THE

DAY OF THE LORD.

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THE

DAY OF THE LORD:

A Lecture

DELIVERED IN ST. JOHN'S (LUTHERAN) CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,
THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, A.D. 1861.

BY

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"In a time like ours, when not only the gospel of the cross, but even the most elementary views of God, of right and light, are foolishness to the Greeks, and often even to the noblest among them, it is of paramount importance to be faithful in the simple and fundamental truths which, however insignificant they may appear, are the foundation of all the rest, and to give all honor to truth with manly moral and logical energy, not heeding the contemptuous shrugging of shoulders of either friend or foe."—Dr. Auberlen.

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Day of the Lord.

A LECTURE ON II. PETER III. 3–14.

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and 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," etc.—2 PETER iii. 3–14.

A VERY important portion of Scripture is that appointed for this day's Epistle, which I have read, and upon which I propose to make a few observations.

The object of these writings of St. Peter, as stated by himself, was to furnish a synopsis of the teachings of both prophets and apostles with respect to the great salvation, and to keep his readers specially admonished as to what they were to expect. And as the substance of evangelical doctrine is contained in his Epistles in general, so the substance of evangelical prediction is contained in this chapter in particular. I cannot enter into all the details, but will select a few topics which may profitably engage our meditations.

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I. The first I name, and that which forms the centre in a group of wonders and at once determines the period to which the whole subject relates, is *the announcement that Christ is to return again to the earth.* It is this doctrine that the whole passage is meant to assert, defend, elucidate, and enforce in its practical bearings. It is a doctrine, also, remarkably prominent in the sacred writings. As a subject of hopeful expectation to the pious, and of terror to the ungodly, it is the most formally, repeatedly, and constantly affirmed. To say nothing about the Old Testament, (which is just as full of it as the New,* but which does not always distinguish

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* "There is scarcely a prophecy in the Old Testament concerning Christ, that doth not, in something or other, relate to his second coming."—*Sir Isaac Newton on Daniel*, p. 132.

"The same oracles which attest the first coming of Christ, as if impatient to be confined to so narrow bounds, overflow, as it were, into the future age, and expatiate on the principal facts and circumstances of his *second coming.*"—*Hurd on the Prophecies*, pp. 129, 130.

"It would be very difficult to select any one entire prophecy from the Old Testament, supposed to relate to this event, [Messiah's coming,] which was *in all its principal particulars* accomplished at our Lord's first coming. So far, indeed, as any importance may be attached to the general expectation of the Israelitish Church before that period, scarcely any of the things which they looked for and mused upon were fulfilled at the first Advent."—*Brooks's Elements of Prophetical Interpretation*, p. 119.

"The coming of Christ is the leading subject of the prophecies, both of the Old and New Testament, either as relates to his first or second coming; and these are often intimately connected together, especially in the Old Testament."—*Bickersteth's Guide to the Prophecies*, p. 69.

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very clearly between the first Advent and the second,) there is hardly a chapter in all the evangelical writings which does not in some way refer to it.* The Savior himself, during his lifetime, spoke largely of a period when the mourning tribes of the earth "shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," and when "he shall send his angels, with a great sound of a trumpet, to gather his elect from the four winds." (See Matt. xxiv., xxv.; Luke xxi.) The mysterious heavenly per-

* "We affirm, that THE REDEEMER'S SECOND APPEARING IS THE VERY POLE-STAR OF THE CHURCH. That it is so held forth in the New Testament, is beyond dispute."—*Christ's Second Coming, by Rev. D. Brown, D.D.*, p. 14.

"I am sure that any individual, who has not made the subject a matter of previous investigation, would be surprised at the result of an attentive research, by discovering how frequently the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is, in Scripture, brought before the believer's view as an event which he ought to keep in constant recollection, to stimulate him to incessant watchfulness and untiring patience in running the race set before him."—*White on the Second Advent*, p. 13.

"This was the great theme on which St. Paul dwelt, to animate the first Christians in their trials and to console them in their afflictions. . . . It is the principal topic of the Apocalypse of St. John; and to this he especially directs the attention of the first Christians."—*Very Rev. J. Baptist Pagani's End of the World*, p. 1.

"As an incentive to repentance and holiness to sinners,—as a motive for watchfulness, prayer, zeal, and diligence on the part of Christian ministers and people,—*more prominence is given to it* [the Savior's second coming] *in the pages of the New Testament than to any other.* The apostles never failed to give point and pungency to their warnings and exhortations by solemn reference to the certainty and suddenness of the Lord's coming."—*Bishop Henshaw on the Second Advent*, p. 220.

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sonages who appeared when he made his triumphant ascension from the Mount of Olives said to those who witnessed it, "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. 9–11.) Paul declares that "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God." (1 Thess. iv. 16.) In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read that "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.) Peter says of himself and his fellow-apostles, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter i. 16.) John says, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him. Even so, Amen." (Rev. i. 7.) And in the very last words which close the canon of Scripture it is written, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. . . . Surely I come quickly; Amen." (Rev. xxii. 16–20.) I know not of another doctrine of the gospel that is announced with more perspicuity or solemnity. Christ's birth of the Virgin Mary is not more explicitly and unequivocally asserted, or more certainly attested, than his return again to the earth as literally and truly as he went up out of it. Nor is there a Creed in Christendom, so far as I know,

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which does not embrace it as an essential part of the Church's faith. "He shall come to judge the quick and the dead," says the Creed which bears the name of The Apostles'. "He shall come again with glory," says the Synod of Nice. "We believe that thou shalt come to be our judge," has been for ages sung in the *Te Deum*. The great Confession of Augsburg affirms that "Christ shall openly come again to judge them that are found alive, and restore to life those that be dead, according to the Creed of the Apostles." "He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all men at the last day," says the Church of England. "We do believe, out of the word of God, that our Lord Jesus Christ shall come again from heaven, and that after a corporal and visible manner, as heretofore he hath ascended, being adorned with great glory and majesty, that he may appear as Judge of quick and dead," says the Confession of Belgia. And with the same unequivocal fulness is this article incorporated in all our hymn-books and liturgies, celebrated in our sacred songs, woven into our very prayers, and uttered over the graves of our friends as we consign their bodies to the ground. Indeed, it is one of the great mountain-peaks of Christianity,—one of the three grand particulars in which its sublimest substance lies. The Incarnation, The Cross, and The Second Coming are the stems upon which every thing distinctive in Christianity is suspended, to which its whole doctrinal system is adjusted, and upon which the hopes of the world depend. To

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strike out either one of these would be to mangle the Scriptures from end to end, to stifle the voice of prophets and apostles, to spoil the noblest of Christian utterances in the days of the Church's greatest purity, and to emasculate religion itself.

If Christianity, then, can teach us any thing, or if the declarations of the Scriptures are at all binding upon us, as we profess to believe that they are, we must accept it as a truth, and rely upon it as an infallible verity, that the same Jesus who was born at Bethlehem, crucified on Calvary, and received up into heaven from Mount Olivet is literally and personally to return again to this world, to be seen with our eyes and heard with our ears, as he was seen and heard in the day that he was taken up. If this be not true, there is no truth in language, no inspiration in the Bible, no substance in our faith, no reality in the Christian's hopes. The methods of interpretation which can explain away this doctrine, or detach it from the teachings and joyous expectations of the prophets and apostles, must, at the same rate, silence all that we have hitherto heeded as the oracles of God, and leave us in a world of darkness with our only lights suddenly and forever extinguished. I accordingly accept and declare it, as a doctrine that must stand or fall with Christianity itself, that Jesus is literally and personally, and with great power and glory, to return again to this world, once more to tread the localities already hallowed to his Church by his miracles and prayers and tears and blood.

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II. A second point I note in the text is *the prediction that, before Christ shall come again, and immediately preceding that great event, this doctrine of his return shall become a subject of cavil, doubt, unbelief, and revilement.* The apostle urges his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the apostles of the Lord and Savior, *knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?* for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were." I learn from these words that, in the times to which the apostle alludes, the subject of Christ's coming and its accompaniments is to be agitated and discussed; that there will be many who will be very unfavorably affected toward it, some of whom will deny it altogether, some revile it as a foolish dream, some agree that it is taught in the Scriptures but to be understood after a manner very different from what the literal terms import; and that there will be a great lack in the minds of people generally of susceptibility to be seriously moved by this subject, except to revile it and to turn it into ridicule. A scoffer is, properly, an insolent ridiculer, a scorner, a contumelious reproacher. Hence, Henry (*in loc.*) describes these scoffers to be persons who "laugh at the very mention of Christ's second coming, and do what in them lies to put all out of countenance who seriously believe and wait for it;—who cannot deny that there *is* a promise, yet laugh at it."

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Isaiah (v. 19), Jeremiah (xvii. 15), and Ezekiel (xii. 22) had before prophesied of similar manifestations with reference to the same subject and the same times. And Christ also says, of some of his own professed servants, that, as the time draws near, they will put aside the subject, and say, "My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite their fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken." (Matt. xxiv. 48–51.)

Startling also is it, in this connection, to think how inoperative and null this powerful doctrine of Christ's speedy return has become in the religion of modern times. It is remarked by a distinguished German theologian* that "the second coming of Christ, viewed in connection with the kingdom established by it upon earth, occupies a much more prominent position in the view of the Sacred Scriptures than in that of the modern Church." The remark is unquestionably true. It may safely be said that there is not another doctrine in the whole Christian Creed, of equal prominence and importance, which is so coldly and indefinitely apprehended, and so jejunely held, by the great mass even of those "who profess and call themselves Christians." People do not exactly deny that there is a promise that Christ will come again; but it is accepted only with so many allowances, that it can hardly be said to be received at all as an efficacious truth. Ministers and expositors have become so ac-

* Dr. Carl August Auberlen, Professor in Basil.

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customed to gloss, spiritualize, and accommodate to other things the passages which speak of it, and so preoccupy their minds with figurative, providential, and imaginary comings of the Savior by means of his doctrines, gospel, and Spirit, that his real coming—which is the only one the Bible speaks of, and which was never meant to pass out of the view of the Church as near at hand—has wellnigh lost its weight and place. It has become to many a mere fable. What earnest Christian does not see and lament the wide-spread influences of rationalism and rationalistic philosophy, explaining away the gospel Revelations, and even the most elementary views of inspiration, of God, and of morality and right? But there are no portions of the Scripture which rationalism so much neglects, despises, or degrades as the prophetic portions, and no class of men whom it reviles with less mercy than those who are so simple as to accept the prophecies in any thing like their literal terms. A few days ago I read, in a sermon preached and published by a divine whose writings are numerous and wide-spread, that "the day of judgment, and the day of the Lord, and the convulsions and changes of nature," spoken of in the prophecies, "are to be interpreted with great latitude of signification, as *in the highest degree figurative;*" that "the day of the Lord is simply a day of calamity, or a season of suffering; the day of judgment, the time when the consequences of our actions overtake us; the end of the world, often the end of the existing state of things; and a new heaven and a

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new earth, a better moral condition of the human race"!* The same author, in the same discourse, says, "For my own part, the world seems to me to be yet in its infancy." "To me there is nothing in the Scriptures, nor in the present state of things, to lead me to apprehend the approach of the end of the world, but every thing against it." Even the late venerable Professor Stuart,—for a long time, if not still, the very leader of New England exposition,—in his review of Duffield on the Second Coming of Christ,† jests and jeers over the whole subject, and laughs at those who take it up, as in the volume he reviews, as believers in "*putid fables.*" When Christianity was in its virgin purity, this was among the most vivifying articles of the Creed,—the incentive to repentance, the motive to faith, the encouragement to fidelity, the inspiration of hope, and the spring of constancy and zeal, which divested even martyrdom of terrors; but in these last days it has become so powerless in the consciences and hearts of men that any serious and practical concern about it is hooted as unscholarly weakness, and the attempt to set it forth according to the words of the Holy Ghost is ridiculed in high ecclesiastical positions as identical with the advocacy of "patristic legends" that would "dishonor the brain of even the Rabbies" in their wildest dreams. Let a man, constrained by his solemn

* Burnap's Miscellaneous Writings, p. 265.

† Hints on Prophecy: Appendix to 2d edition.

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convictions and accountabilities, lift up his voice to reassert it in its true scriptural vigor and to bid his fellows be ready for its speedy realization, and pulpits and presses point at him as more than a little crazed, and laughingly put him down on their ready list of lunatic saints whose like utterances they say time proved to be but dreams. We look on, and wonder that some of the best and most learned men that have lived should be so flippantly despatched, and that such momentous subjects should be so jeeringly set aside. And yet we ought not to wonder. The Scriptures long ago said it would be so; and St. Peter, in stirring us up to remembrance, would have us assured, first of all, that such things the last days would bring forth. God has not, indeed, left himself without witnesses. There are those to whom the doctrine of the "coming and kingdom" of the Lord Jesus is a living power; whose hearts are kindled with the blessed "promise of his coming;" who, with eloquent tongues and ready pens, are valiantly contending for this portion of "the faith once delivered to the saints;" and who, though laughed at and reviled by men, are yet honored and prospered of God. Nor are their words without effect in many meek and pious hearts, who with them wait and hope for the coming of the Lord. But the great mass of Christendom has no sympathy with them, and takes pleasure in twitting them for their credulity and want of better learning. And what is all this but *Peter's prophecy fulfilling*,—the very Church joining

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in the ribald cry, "Where is the promise of his coming?"*

III. A third point I notice in this passage is *the important chronological statement which it contains with reference to the second coming of the Lord.* In reckoning whether God has been slack or not concerning this promise, the apostle urges it upon us very particularly not to overlook the fact, but to remember, "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Moses, in the nineteenth Psalm, had made a similar statement nearly two thousand years before. It was also a common thing among the ancient people of God to reckon days as typical of thousands of years. And as there are but *seven days,* (all the rest being but repetitions of these,) it was held that these seven days represented so many thousands of years, in which the world, and God's administrations

* "Those who deny the coming of the Lord, and the other great events of which the prophets speak, instead of proving that the prophecies shall never be literally fulfilled, are themselves striking instances and examples of the certainty of their accomplishment; for St. Peter has expressly prophesied of these men, whom he calls scoffers, that would make a jeer of the coming of the Lord. Our Savior himself prophesied that before his coming men would grow so secure that they would set at naught all the signs and tokens of his appearance. And it is a rule with me, the more I hear people deny the coming of Christ, the day of judgment, and the conflagration, with other things of the like nature, the more to hold on to them; for their denial is to me one of the highest proofs of the certainty of those events."—*Winchester's Lectures on the Prophecies,* vol. iii. p. 151.

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concerning it, would be consummated. They said that as the world was six days in making, so it will continue for six thousand years, to complete what has since been undertaken with regard to it; and that as God rested the seventh day and hallowed it, so the seventh thousand years is to be a great and hallowed world-Sabbath, in which the finished works of grace shall exhibit to God and furnish to its subjects a perfect rest.* Paul tells us, also, that there does remain to the people of God *a rest*, which Joshua did not give, and that that rest is a *σαββατισμος*,—*a Sabbath-keeping*. (Heb. iv. 8, 9.) And in the Revelation of John (xx. 4–7) we are told of a certain thousand years, far down at the end of the world, at the commencement of which Satan is to be bound, the powers of wickedness overthrown, and the saints raised from the dead, and during which the martyrs are to sit on thrones, and all the pious dead to be made blessed and holy as the priests of God and of Christ, and to reign with him,—which answers exactly to the idea of a Great Sabbath. These statements, taken along with this declaration of St. Peter, that one day is to be

* "The tradition that the earth, as well as the moral and religious state of its inhabitants, were to undergo a great change at the end of six thousand years, has been detected in the writings of Pagans, Jews, and Christians. It is found in the most ancient of those commentaries of the Old Testament which we owe to the Rabbinical school, and . . . preceded by several centuries the introduction of the Christian faith."—*Bishop Russell on the Millennium*, p. 39.

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taken as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, seem very well to bear out the old tradition—referred to Elijah the prophet—that the world shall continue for six thousand years,—two thousand years void, or without the law; two thousand years under the law; and two thousand under the Messiah,—and that the seventh thousand years will be "the day of the holy, blessed God," "the day of judgment, and the world to come." It is very certain that a very large proportion of the profoundest and best Christian teachers have accepted it as presenting the truth of God, and regulated their faith on this subject accordingly.

The apostolic *Barnabas*, the companion of St. Paul, "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost," has left us an Epistle, in which he says, (chap. xiii. 3–6,) "God made in six days the works of his hands, and he finished them the seventh day, and he rested the seventh day, and sanctified it. Consider, my children, what that signifies: he finished them in six days. The meaning of it is this: that *in six thousand years the Lord will bring all things to an end. For with him one day is a thousand years, as himself testifieth.* Therefore, children, in six days—that is, in six thousand years—shall all things be accomplished. And what is that he saith, And he rested the seventh day? *He meaneth this: that when his Son shall come, and abolish the season of the wicked one, and judge the ungodly, and shall change the sun, moon, and stars,* THEN *he shall gloriously rest in that seventh* day."

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Irenæus, whose Christian preceptor was the distinguished Polycarp, one of those "angels" of the Churches to whom the Savior in the Apocalypse directed one of the seven Epistles, also says, "In whatever number of days the world was created, in the same number of thousands of years it will come to its consummation. God, on the sixth day, finished the works which he made; and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. This is a history of the past, and a prophecy of the future; for the day of the Lord is as a thousand years."

Victorinus, Bishop of Pettaw, who was one of the martyrs in the persecution A.D. 303–313, says, "The true and proper Sabbath shall be kept in the seventh millennium: therefore the Lord hath assigned to those seven days individually a thousand years."

Lactantius, who lived about the same period, says, "Let the philosophers, therefore, who reckon up thousands of ages from the beginning of the world, understand that the sum total has not yet reached the six thousandth year; and, when that number is complete, an end must be made of the present state of things, and the condition of humanity be moulded anew for the better. . . . As, then, all the works of God were finished in six days, the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years. . . . And again, as, when his works were finished, he rested on the seventh day, and blessed it, it follows that upon the end of the six thousandth year all evil and wickedness must be wiped away from the earth, and justice

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reign for a thousand years, and the world enjoy a calm and repose from the labors it has now so long endured."

Cyprian, the noted Bishop of Carthage, who died a martyr to his faith, also says, "In the Divine arrangement of the world, seven days were at first employed, and in them seven thousand years were included."

It would be easy to cite numerous other authorities of this sort from among the ancient Christian fathers, such as Clement, Justin Martyr, Papias, Tertullian, Hilary, Jerome, and Augustine.

The Reformers also reckoned after the same manner. In the British Museum, in a copy of the first edition of Luther's German Bible, on the third page of the fly-leaves of the second volume, there is an entry in the handwriting of *Melancthon*, dated and signed by himself, in these words:—"Six thousand years this world shall stand, and after that be burned:—two thousand years void; two thousand years the law of Moses; two thousand years the day of the Messiah."*

Luther acquiesced in the same view. In the preface to his *Chronica*, as translated by Aurifaber, he says, "The chronology of Philip Melancthon, published under the name of 'Carionis,' is one in which the entire course of the world is most excellently embraced or distributed in six millenniums, or six thousand years, *which I also have followed;*"

* See also Melancth. Opera, tom. ii. p. 525.

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and concludes with these words, set out in large letters, line for line:—

"A SAYING OF THE SCHOOL OF ELIAS THE PROPHET.

Six thousand years shall the world stand:
Two thousand, void.
Two thousand, the Law.
Two thousand, Christ.
These are unto God the six days of the week.
The seventh is the everlasting Sabbath.
Psalm xc. 5, and 2 Peter iii. 8.
A thousand years are to the Lord as one day."*

Bishop Latimer also says, "The world was ordained of God to continue, as Scripture and learned men agree, six thousand years."

Shall we, then, receive or reject this computation of the times of this world? I believe that we accept much upon far more slender grounds. Where to find serious objections to it, I know not. How to confute it, I am at a loss. Thus far, God himself has conformed the order of his providence to it. The passages of Scripture to which I have referred more than harmonize with it. If they do not absolutely assert or require it, they suggest it and are best interpreted by it. It conforms to that typical system upon which nearly every thing was originally constructed. It has been believed and taught as a revelation from God by a very large number of the ablest and most reliable of Christian teachers. The ancient Jewish Church held it as a settled verity.

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* Walch's Luther, vol. xiv. pp. 1111, 1117

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And, for one, I feel bound to accept it, until God shall teach me better.

In what year of the world's age we are living, it is not possible at this day accurately to ascertain. According to the common reckoning, it will yet be about one hundred and thirty-five years to the end of the six thousand. But there is nothing upon which learned men differ more than on the subject of chronology. I know of no system which can be received with confidence. Some make the time more, and some less, to the end of the six thousand years. Jarvis calculates yet one hundred and twenty years; Browne, about thirty; Bliss, about twenty; Shimeall and Saville, about seven; Bowen, five; and Fynes Clinton, but *one*. The truth is, that nothing very definite is known on the subject. We know only that we are in the evening of the last mystic day,—the Saturday of the world's long week. At any rate, Peter's remark is true, that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." Though always presenting "the day of the Lord" as *near*, and really and truly so in various important respects, yet so in the highest and fullest sense only according to that system which takes a thousand years as one day. This was his gracious plan from the beginning, to which he has all the time been working, delaying to execute speedy vengeance upon the wickedness of men, and exercising upon them his great long-suffering that they might repent and be saved. He always meant to come, and to come *soon;* but he never promised to come

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any sooner than at the end of six thousand year-days, which are only now for the first time verging to their close.

We may, accordingly, take this text as an intimation that a great Sabbath of rest and glory is in reserve for this world, and that, if no special providence shall come in to shorten the time, we may expect it to commence at the conclusion of the six thousandth year from the creation,—which cannot any longer be far off. May God hasten the time!

IV. Another point I notice in the text is *the statement as to the manner in which "the day of the Lord" shall be ushered in.* The apostle says it "will come," notwithstanding the skepticism and the scoffs of men, and that it will come "as a thief in the night." Paul also makes the same statement, in the same words, as a matter well understood by the primitive Christians. (1 Thess. v. 2.) And the Savior himself has given notice, "Behold, I come as a thief," (Rev. xvi. 15;) not, indeed, with the designs of a thief, but in such time and in such manner as the thief comes,—or, as he elsewhere explains it, "*in such an hour as ye think not.*" (Matt. xxiv. 44.)

That hour will be an hour of "*the night,*" both literally and figuratively. Night is the time when thieves work; and the statement is that he will come "as a thief *in the night.*" When the unembodied Word of God, at the beginning, first came into our world, it was night; for "darkness was upon the

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face of the deep;" and that Word was, "*Let there be light,* and there was light." When that same Word became incarnate, and was born into the world as a man, it was in the night,—while shepherds were "keeping watch over their flock by night." And so his coming in the great day shall also be "in the night." Whether it shall be "in the second watch, or in the third watch," whether "at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning," we know not. This only we know,—that it shall be "in the night," "while mankind is wrapt in sleep, and worldly fancy feeds on golden dreams." But in the figurative, as well as in the literal, night,—in the darkest hour of the Church and of the world; when there will be but little genuine apostolic faith and life in the earth, and the virgins, both wise and foolish, are slumbering and sleeping; when the powers of darkness have put forth their last and most successful attempts, and unsanctified humanity is most deluded with dreams of security and progress,—then the day of the Lord shall come, and the long-absent Jesus be again revealed.

That hour will also be an unexpected hour. The thief comes unexpectedly. He does not tell the goodman of the house when he will come. He tries to make his approach with as little intimation of it at the time as possible. And so "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven." (Matt. xxiv. 36.) "As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe

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entered into the ark, *and knew not* until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matt. xxiv. 38.) Preceding signs there will be,—"signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth," (Luke xxi. 25, 26,)—but not such signs as the unbelieving world shall understand and heed, (Daniel xii. 10;) for up to the very time of the bursting forth of doom they shall be saying, "Peace and safety." (1 Thess. v. 3.) The wise, indeed, shall understand, and "are not in darkness, that that day should overtake *them* as a thief." (1 Thess. v. 4.) Occupying, watching, waiting, expecting, as the Savior commands, they shall be ready to receive him, and to shout, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" yea, and to mount up to meet him as on eagles' wings. (Isa. xl. 31.)

But with suddenness, as well as stealth, shall that hour come. To all whose hearts are overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, it shall "come *unawares*." The destruction which it is to bring to the guilty will be "*sudden* destruction." (1 Thess. v. 3.) But even in the case of those prepared for it, it will come with a degree of suddenness. Upon "*all*,"—"all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth,"—which would seem to include the devout and watchful as well as the careless and unbelieving, the Savior says, it will come "*as a snare*." (Luke xxi. 35.) Quick as the spark from smitten steel, and sudden as the lightning's flash, shall it break in upon the world. "For as the

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lightning cometh out of the east and *flasheth* even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matt. xxiv. 27.) "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," says the apostle, (1 Cor. xv. 52,) shall the great translation be effected; and before we know it "we shall be changed."

There is also this other feature attending the operations of the thief,—that he is usually in the house, and through or well on with his work, before his presence is discovered. We miss what he has taken, we behold the depredations he has wrought, or we are aroused by the crackling of the flames his hands have ignited. And so Jesus will perhaps be here, and doing his work, before we become acquainted with the fact. I suppose that the first evidence the living saints will have of his presence will be contemporaneous with their translation; but there is at least one great transaction connected with the scenes of that hour which shall precede the translation. Paul says, "We that are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not *go before* them which are asleep;" and that when the Lord shall descend "the dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thess. iv. 15, 16.) Every Christian's grave shall be vacated, and his corruptible body have put on immortality, before one living saint shall be translated. Here, then, will be something carried off before the world shall find out any thing about what has happened; for I suppose that the resurrection of the saints will conform to that of their Lord, and not occur visibly to men in the flesh. So far as we

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know, nobody saw Christ rise. And it would seem as if the same stealth were to attend the translation also. A man in his bed shall awake, and find his wife gone; and another shall call for his faithful servant, and find him missing; and watchers at the couch of affliction shall look for their patient, and he shall not be, because God has taken him. It is so that Enoch seems to have been stolen away from the earth. (Heb. ii. 5.) Elijah in his ascension was visible to his friend and successor only as a special favor of God which he could not promise in advance. (2 Kings ii. 10.) And with the stealthiness of the undiscovered thief the Savior, it seems, will come and remove his chosen saints without their most intimate earthly friends knowing it, except by what they afterward miss. Hath he not said as much himself? What are his words? "I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (Luke xvii. 34–36.) What are we to gather from this, but that the one shall find the other stolen away from him without his knowing it at the time? The wise virgins met the Bridegroom, and had already entered in with him to the feast, before the foolish ones found it out. "The day of the Lord cometh *as a thief in the night!*" Solemn and affecting truth! "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always," saith your Lord. (Luke xxi. 36.)

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V. Still another point I notice in the text is *the terrific conflagration which is to take place when Christ comes.* It is remarkable that great fires are everywhere spoken of in connection with the day of Christ's revelation. Paul says, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, *in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God and that obey not the gospel.*" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.) Even in the Old Testament it was prophesied, "Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up." (Mal. iv. 1.) Yea, saith the Lord, "I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke." (Joel ii. 30.) And so we also read, in the text, of fire, and very great heat, and melting, and burning, in the air and in the elements, in the earth and in the things on the earth. More, however, has been made of these fires than, I think, is warranted by Scripture. The most explicit passage on the subject in all the Bible is this from Peter, which is rather strongly translated, and so worded in our version as to lead off the reader's imagination beyond what I believe to be the apostle's meaning.

He speaks of "the heavens being on fire," and as to "pass away" and "be dissolved." People read this, and begin to think of the regions of the sun, moon, and stars, and so mount up among the orbs and systems of creation, until the words before them become a picture of the entire wreck of the

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whole material universe. But I am satisfied that there was nothing of the sort in the mind of Peter, or of the Holy Ghost by which he wrote. The word rendered "heavens" means simply the atmosphere which surrounds the earth, and does not carry us any further than the regions of the clouds and winds,—"the *air*," (Matt. viii. 20; Rev. xix. 17,) "the *sky*," (Matt. xvi. 3,) the realm of the clouds, (Matt. xxiv. 30; James v. 18.) The word rendered "being on fire" simply means inflamed, made fiery, and may be considered as having its import in this place exhausted by a condition of the atmosphere in which it is heated, filled with fiery volcanic emissions, and lit up with lightnings. The word rendered "shall pass away" does not mean, to cease to exist.* It means, to *pass*, as from one place or state to another; as where we read, "that no man might *pass* by that way," (Matt. viii. 28,) "Jesus of Nazareth *passeth by*," (Luke xviii. 37.) As applied to the atmosphere, it expresses a change implying motion, and that very violent and boisterous, as the accompanying word, rendered "with a great

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"I cannot but feel astonished that any serious and intelligent man should have his mind fettered with the common—I might call it the vulgar—notion of a proper destruction of the earth. Some seem to extend the notion to the whole solar system, applied to the idea of an extinction of it and reducing to nothing; and this notion has been general, and thus it has gained so strong a hold upon the feelings of many pious persons that they have made it an article of faith. But I confess myself unable to find any evidence for it in nature, reason, or Scripture.—*John Pye Smith, D.D., F.R.S.: Geology and Revelation*, p. 161.

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noise," also indicates.* The additional word rendered "dissolved" is of the same general import. It means to loosen, unbind; as where the Savior says of the colt, "*Loose* him;" and of the apostles, "Whatsoever ye *shall loose* on earth shall be *loosed* in heaven." It is used in Acts xxvii. 41 with reference to the breaking away of the hinder part of the ship in which Paul was wrecked. It refers here to the rupture of those influences which now hold the various parts of the physical world in quiet,—to a freeing of the elements to rush and dash about in destructive commotion and unrestrained fury, just as the Psalmist describes the scene:—"Our God shall come; a fire shall devour before him, *and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.*" (Ps. l. 3.) This is the whole extent of the terms concerning the fate of "the heavens."

And even in what is said of "the earth" the word does not necessarily mean the entire globe on which we dwell. We often speak of *the earth* without meaning the whole planet. When any violent upheaval or agitation of the surface of the earth occurs in a particular district or country, we say, *the earth* shook, and call it an *earth*quake,—when really it was only the crust of the earth, and that in one limited locality. In the night-time we say, *the earth* is wrapped in darkness, when it is less than one-half of the earth that is so enshrouded. The same word is also frequently translated *land, country;* as, "the

* ροιζηδον, with a noisy rushing. Cranmer's Bible reads, "*in the manner of a tempest;*" De Wette, "*mit Geräusch.*"

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land of Gennesaret," (Mark vi. 53.) "His fame went abroad in all *that country*," (Matt. ix. 31,)—where the original is, all that *earth*. And when we here read of the burning of the earth, we are by no means warranted in jumping at the conclusion that it means the reduction of the entire globe to chaos, ashes, or nothingness. The earth may be vastly and terrifically subjected to the action of fire and yet many sections of it experience no inconvenience whatever. The phrase "burnt up" is also rather expressive for the original, which means simply *to be burned*. The idea of total consumption is often attached to it, but not necessarily. A very great degree of burning is doubtless expressed by it in this place, but not so much as alone to convey the idea, so often presented, that the whole organized structure of the earth is to be reduced to liquid fire, converted into cinders, or swept out of existence. Terrific as these judgment-fires will doubtless be, and fearful as will be the desolations they shall spread among the enemies of righteousness and upon the armies of antichrist, and great as shall be the changes they are to work in earth, air, and sea, I find nothing whatever in this or any other portion of Scripture to induce the belief that they will extend further than the particular sections and localities where Christ shall first be manifested.

By "the elements," of which the apostle speaks, we are to understand the substances or component parts of the physical world. They do not include every thing embraced in the constitution of the earth,

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except as every constituent element of the earth is found in any given portion of it; just as we find the elements of the ocean in any drop from the ocean. The reference, plainly, is only to such fusible and inflammable substances as may be subject to the action of the judgment-fires, without determining any thing as to the extent of the conflagration. The word rendered "*shall melt*" is very much the same as that just before translated "dissolved," and is nearly everywhere else in the Scriptures translated *loosed*. The additional word rendered "with fervent heat" is the participle of a verb signifying *to be heated, set on fire, inflamed*. The plain grammatical meaning of the phrase is, that certain elementary substances of the earth shall become loosed and disintegrated by being heated and set on fire, as in the case of great and violent volcanic eruptions, when vast floods of fire and lava are ejected from the earth, filling whole countries with darkness and destruction.

And in such a condition of things we can easily conceive what is meant by the other phrase, "the works that are in the earth shall be burned." Our version reads, "*all* the works;" but this word *all*, upon which some lay so much stress in this connection, is not in the original. It is an addition of the translator. There is no reason to believe that *all* the works that are in the earth shall be burned. Of course, as far as the earth itself is burned, and as far as the heated storms and floods of loosed and melted elements shall extend, so far all the works of man shall be consumed and destroyed.

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But, as there is nothing to show that the burning and fusing of the earth is to be universal, so there is no reason to believe that this destruction of the works that are in it is to be universal: the one is commensurate with the other, and in neither case do the words imply universality.

The statement which the apostle gives concerning the *object* of these fires also bears out the conclusion that they are not to be universal. They are "for the perdition of ungodly men;" that is, for the temporal destruction,* and the precipitation into the torments of another world, of those upon whom Christ's particular vengeance is to fall in that notable day of the Lord. The "ungodly men" here spoken of I cannot take to be all classes of the unregenerate, including everybody not found worthy to escape the great tribulation of those times. The Scriptures teach that there will be even Christian people, in that day, who will not be counted worthy, and who shall be "left" when Christ has taken to himself those found fit for the translation. The parable of the ten virgins is proof enough on this point. Five of these virgins were foolish; but they were still *virgins*, and also had the oil of grace in their lamps. They do not, therefore, rank with "ungodly men," and those eminently wicked and blasphemous people who are everywhere singled out as the subjects of the great destruction. These, then, and

* The Geneva version reads "destruction," instead of "perdition;" De Wette, "*Unterganges*"—*overthrow.*

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many others, shall be "left" upon the earth, in the flesh, when Christ comes, and shall pass over, as Noah and his family over the flood, to be the subjects of that new order of things which is then to be set up. The victims of these judgment-fires are to be only the actually and flagrantly wicked, men distinguished for their impiety and rejection of the claims of God, confederates in wrong, adherents of the beast and the false prophet, and despisers and blasphemers of the gospel of Jesus; as we read in various passages of Scripture.* "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." (Isa. ii. 12.) And that these characters may receive this their doom in the most signal manner, we read that they are to be marvellously drawn together by Providence, (Zech. xiv. 2; Rev. xvi. 16,) as the wicked Jews in the end of their state were gathered together within the walls of Jerusalem, and, at a moment when they least expect it, the Lord will "plead against them with pestilence and with blood, and will rain upon them an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, and fire, and brimstone," (Ezek. xxviii. 32;) "and their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth," (Zech. xiv. 12;) whilst their leaders are

* See Dan. vii. 10, 11; Matt. xiii. 41, 42; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8; Rev xvi. 13–19; xix. 19, 20.

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"cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone;" so fulfilling the words of the Psalm, (xxxvii. 20,) "The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away!" And so also shall it be with all their works.

Nor are these judgment-fires then first to be created. They already exist, stored away in the mysterious constitution of nature. Our version speaks of "the heavens and the earth which are now," as "kept in store, reserved unto fire." But many translate the apostle's words to mean that it is *the fire* that is stored.* According to this render-

* Dr. E. B. Elliott, author of the admirable work called *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, (vol. iv. p. 192, 4th edition,) makes the following note on this point:—

"The heavens and the earth which now are (*i.e.* contradistinctively to those that were overwhelmed by the flood) are by the same word *stored with fire*, (so I understand the phrase,) 'being kept unto the day of judgment,' &c. It is only by this rendering of the τεθησαυρισμενοι πυρι that the apostle's evidently intended antithesis can be expressed, between the old world *stored with water*, by which, *as the instrumentality*, it at its appointed time perished; and the present world *stored with fire*, by which *it*, in its time, is also to perish. Besides that, in the received sense, τεθησαυρισμενοι is a word not merely superfluous but inappropriate; '*stored up*' being a phrase used of things laid aside from present use, which certainly our present earth and atmosphere are not. Compare, as to the *water*, Ps. xxxiii. 7, (Sept.,) τιθεις εν θησαυροις αβυσσους· and, as to the *fire*, Job xxviii. 5, rendered by the Chaldee, 'Beneath the earth is *Gehenna*.' Also Isaiah xxxiii. 33: 'Tophet is ordained of old: for the king it is prepared: he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire, and much wood: the breath of the Lord, as a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.'

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ing, this passage furnishes a remarkable illustration of how the Scriptures have anticipated the discoveries and inductions of modern science. All the elements around us are full of latent fire. The earth we tread on is a globe of imprisoned fire. For every fifty feet you penetrate into its interior you have the temperature a degree warmer than at the surface. If you were to bore on inward towards its centre, you would not reach the depth of one hundred miles before coming to an intensity of heat which would fuse the hardest substances of which the earth is composed.* Scientific men, accordingly, assure us that under a thin crust, proportioned to the whole mass about as the tire to the wheel of a wagon, there seethes a whole world of fires, struggling for vent, and here and there showing themselves from volcanic

"Similarly Tertullian, Apol. 47: '*Gehennam*, quæ est *ignis arcani subterranei* ad pœnam *thesaurus*.' In which view of the *fiery* interior of the earth, other fathers agreed: as Jerome on Jonah ii.: 'Infernis in media terræ esse perhibetur.'"

* "Wherever, in Europe and America, the temperature of the air, the waters, and the rocks in deep excavations has been ascertained, it has been found higher than the mean temperature of the climate at the surface; and the experiment has been made in hundreds of places. It is found, too, that the heat increases rapidly as we descend below that point in the earth's crust to which the sun's heat extends. The mean rate of increase has been stated by the British Association to be *one degree of Fahrenheit for every forty-five feet. At this rate*, ALL KNOWN ROCKS WOULD MELT AT THE DEPTH OF ABOUT SIXTY MILES. Shall we hence conclude that all the matter of the globe below this thickness is actually in a melted state? Most geologists have not seen how such a conclusion is to be avoided."—*Prof. Hitchcock's Lecture on the Future Condition and Destiny of the Earth.*

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craters. And it is simply the *letting loose* of these, with the tempests, and earthquakes, and convulsions in earth and air which must needs attend such an event, that the apostle here sets before us. Whilst the descending Savior shall be revealed in clouds, thunder, and terrific lightnings from above, the fiery flood from beneath shall break open its prison-doors, and a war of loosed elements ensue, at which the whole earth and heavens shall shake, the sun be darkened, and the moon become as blood, whilst earth's rightful King shall ride upon it all, sweeping out before his dread chariot-wheels the culminated strength of hell's monstrous usurpations!

VI. But I pass to another topic. The apostle speaks of "*new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*" He seems to be delivering himself upon this point in the name of all his fellow-apostles. He speaks of this new order of things as the common Christian expectation. I receive it, therefore, as a doctrine of Christianity, that there are to be "new heavens and a new earth." Nay, the apostle goes further: he says that God himself has promised "new heavens and a new earth." Nor will it be hard to find the record of that promise. The word of the Lord, by Isaiah the prophet, (lxv. 17; lxvi. 22,) long ago was, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create." "For the new heavens and the new earth, which I will

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make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord." There has been a strong disposition in men, somehow, to spiritualize and explain away this promise, as every thing else relating to the kingdom to come. Some tell us that it is nothing but poetic figure. Let me assure you that it is literal reality. Peter quotes it as literal reality. When he speaks of "the heavens and the earth which are now," he means the literal heavens and earth. The burnings and loosenings of which he would have his readers stand in awe are literal burnings. The changes that he predicts are changes that are to occur in the material earth we stand on, and in the air we breathe, with no more figure about them than about the waters of the flood. And directly from these saddening desolations he passes to the subject of their reparation, connecting the promise of the new heavens and earth with the breaking down of the present heavens and earth, and fortifies himself against regrets over the one by the excellencies which he anticipates in the other. And if he is not speaking with equal literalness of both, it is useless to confide in the certainty of language. Besides, what are figurative heavens and earth in the place of the literal and real ones? and what can a spiritual reparation do for a natural desolation? Will a sweet word in the ear mend a rent in a garment? From all the terms, surroundings, and common laws of speech and association belonging to the case, the apostle can mean no other than a literal new heavens and earth. And what prophets announced, and Peter looked for, John in

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vision saw, not in symbol, but also in literal reality. Following immediately upon his description of the judgment-scenes, we find this record:—"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." (Rev. xxi. 1.) I claim, therefore, that these new heavens and earth are to be, and that it is one of the consolations of a Christian to expect them.

Nor are we to suppose that they will be quite other heavens and earth than those we have at present. Great changes are to be made, but not a new creation, separate and distinct from that which now is. Peter says of the world before the flood, that it "perished." But it was not the earth that perished. It was only the order and constitution of things upon it. It was the same earth after the flood that it was before, though somewhat altered in its configuration and inhabitants. And as the perishing in the one case is cited as corresponding to the dissolution and passing away in the other, I cannot but take the new heavens and earth to be, simply, the present heavens and earth *renewed;* that is, made new again,—brought back to their original excellence. The same law will, doubtless, hold alike in all departments of redemption, and the method in one be the same in all. Redemption has three territories: the soul, the body, and the material world, of which the body forms a part. In two of these, at least, it is not God's method to destroy the old and to put an entirely new creation in its place. "The new man" is simply the old man renewed,—

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the same heart brought under new influences and put into a new condition. The risen and glorified body is the same corrupt and dying body we put into the grave, only transfigured and fashioned to another pattern, with new attributes. It is the same soul after regeneration that it was before regeneration, with the same inherent constitution. We call it "a new creature." We say, "old things have passed away, and behold all things have become new." But it was the same Paul after the scenes of Damascus as before; at least, as to all the elements of his constituent nature. The risen body of Christ was the same that was crucified, with even the nail-prints and the side-wound which it carried with it to the grave. It had new qualities and adaptations; but it was the same body. It is "this corruptible" that must put on incorruption, and "this mortal" that must put on immortality. And as in these two departments I conclude it will be in the only remaining one,—that the new heavens and earth are to be nothing more nor less than the present heavens and earth, subjected to new and regenerating influences, evolving new qualities, and adapting them to be the fit abode of the redeemed. Redeemed men can hardly be considered redeemed without that redemption being extended to the material world with which they are by essential nature so closely related. But I cannot conceive of a redeemed material world other than as of a redeemed man, in which the continuity of essential nature is simply modified, not broken. The Savior

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himself has also dropped a word upon this subject which sets it in a very clear light. It is found in Matt. xix. 28. He there refers his followers, for the reward of their sacrifices for his sake, to the time "when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory." The Son of man is never spoken of as sitting, or to sit, on the throne of his glory, except at his coming at the end of the present order of things, usually called "the end of the world." And yet he calls this session upon his throne, and ending of the present world, and his administrations in that connection, "THE REGENERATION,"—the palingenesia —the renovation—the making of things new again.*

* This application of the word "*regeneration*," in this passage, does not so clearly appear in most of our English Bibles. Dr. Campbell has made the following criticism in the case:—

"The clause *εν τη παλιγγενεσια*, here, may be construed either with the preceding words or with the following. In the former of these ways our translators have understood them, and have, therefore, rendered the verse, 'I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' I think, on the contrary, that the words ought to be understood in the latter way, and have, therefore, translated them in this manner:—'I say unto you, that *at the renovation*, when the Son of man shall be seated on his glorious throne, ye my followers, sitting also upon twelve thrones, shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel.'"—*Preliminary Dissertations and Notes on the Gospels, by George Campbell, D.D.*, vol. i. p. 460.

The Syriac New Testament, according to Murdock's Literal Translation, very clearly coincides with this rendering:—"Jesus said unto them, Verily I say to you, that, as for you who have followed me, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory *in the new world*, ye also shall sit on twelve seats, and shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel."

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this great and terrible day of the Savior's coming, to the scenes of desolation which are to attend its introduction, and to the glories which it is to bring to the believing and faithful, and drawing from these the considerations with which to make his admonitions effective, he takes his stand in the presence of the whole Christian Church, and makes this as his select, last, and most solemn appeal:—"WHEREFORE, BELOVED, SEEING THAT YE LOOK FOR SUCH THINGS, BE DILIGENT THAT YE MAY BE FOUND OF HIM IN PEACE, WITHOUT SPOT, AND BLAMELESS."

A subject capable of such a use as this it is profane and blasphemous to stigmatize as a matter of mere speculation. Could any thing be more solemn, or touch more deeply upon the profoundest vitalities of religion? Let us, then, take it duly to heart, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. Happy that minister who shall fashion his exhortations to this apostolic model; and happy that man who shall model his expectations and his life according to this apostolic exhortation!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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