



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Thoughts for Advent



600088954/

FOR ADVENT.

BY THE

ASHTON OXENDEN, D.D.

OF MONTREAL AND METROPOLITAN OF CANADA.



LONDON:

ARDS, PICCADILLY.

AMS, AND CO. PATERNOSTER ROW.

1872.

38. c. 124.

THOUGHTS FOR ADVENT.

BY THE

RT. REV. ASHTON OXENDEN, D.D.

BISHOP OF MONTREAL AND METROPOLITAN OF CANADA.



LONDON :

HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO. PATERNOSTER ROW.

1872.

138. c. 124.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY JOHN STRANGEWAYS,
Castle St. Leicester Sq.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE COMING DAWN	I
II. ADVENT A SUBJECT BOTH OF SORROW AND JOY	13
III. OUR PRESENT LIFE OF EXPECTATION	21
IV. ADVENT CLAIMS	37
V. FURTHER CLAIMS	47
VI. THE TIME OF OUR LORD'S COMING	54
VII. THE MANNER OF OUR LORD'S COMING	66
VIII. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH OUR LORD WILL COME	73
IX. THE GLORIOUS PROSPECT	86

THOUGHTS FOR ADVENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING DAWN.

THE Season of Advent has long been observed in the Christian Church : some think as far back as Apostolic times ; but certainly for the last fourteen hundred years. The Church has appointed the four weeks of Advent to wait, as it were, upon the great festival of Christmas, and to prepare our minds for all the blessings which that day commemorates.

The Saviour's first coming into this world was the great object of expectation to the

R

Church of old. Holy men looked forward to it with longing hearts. Faith enabled them to see Christ as it were in the distance. It was a kind of telescope to them: it brought the Saviour near to them. Thus it is said of Abraham, that he 'rejoiced to see the day of Christ: he saw it, and was glad.' His own life had passed away many hundred years before Jesus appeared; but he beheld Him with the eye of faith. Others also of the Patriarchs had momentary glimpses of the coming Redeemer. The Prophets too, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, were enabled to speak of His advent as of a thing most certain. He was the great object to the believer from age to age—the hidden treasure, which was one day to enrich and gladden a ruined world.

Many of course lacked this faith. They could not, and would not, believe in the promised Deliverer. His advent was a truth they could not grasp. They 'believed not

the report' which announced His coming. Some *ridiculed* the idea, and regarded it as an event that would never come to pass. Others were too *careless*, and too much absorbed with the world's interests, to concern themselves about a thing which seemed so vague and so distant. It was a matter which conveyed no interest to them.

And yet God's word, which never fails, came true. In spite of man's unbelief and indifference, the Saviour appeared. The long-looked-for day at length dawned. When 'the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son.' The world was staggered by His appearance. It could not realise the event. 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' But the few who did receive Him welcomed Him with all their hearts, and accepted Him as 'God's unspeakable gift' to a needy world.

We all know what passed in the thirty-three years which followed ; how Jesus lived here among us, such a life as had never been

lived before, a blameless, spotless life, a life of sorrow and of suffering, and yet of holiness and peace; and then ended it by such an act of love as had never been accomplished. He paid the penalty of the cross for our transgressions; giving not money merely—silver and gold—but something infinitely more valuable—giving *Himself* a ransom for us all. And then, His great errand having been accomplished, He returned to ‘the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.’

But He is not gone from us for ever. His intercourse with His people is not at an end. His promise to His disciples was, ‘I am with you always.’ And this promise we may still realise. We may feel at this moment that He is with us, to strengthen us in our weakness, to watch over us in our dangers, to draw near to us at all times. He is so closely united to us that nothing can separate us. We are in Him, and He in us. We are as much one with Him as

the Branch is one with the Vine, feeding upon Him day by day, and giving up unto Him in all things. Because He lives, we live also.

But this is not all. He is the 'certain Nobleman,' who is gone 'into a far country,' but promises to return. He is 'the Bridegroom,' who tarries for a while, but will come again to receive His bride. He is 'the Sun of Righteousness,' who is out of sight for a time, but will soon reappear, bringing on the dawn of a glorious day, never more to set again.

All this is plainly recorded; but how is it received? The announcement of Christ's Second Coming meets with precisely the same reception that His First Coming did. Some hear of it with a smile: it cannot, and it will not, be, they think; it is not likely; they see no signs of it; they speak of it with the lip of scorn. To others again it is a matter of little interest; they care for the realities of life; what they see every day

before them is something tangible and solid ; to that they give their whole hearts ; and around it all their interests gather. But this great and blessed subject has no charm for them. There is however a little flock, a few faithful ones among the unbelieving, whose hearts and hopes are lifted upwards, who not only believe in the actual presence of their unseen Lord, but who look forward and long for His reappearing.

The doctrine of the Second Advent is one of the most plainly announced truths of the New Testament ; and yet it is one that is less generally laid hold of, and acted upon, than perhaps any other.

How is this ? Because the doctrine has been abused and perverted. Men have speculated upon it, attempting to be wise above what is written. It is a doctrine which teaches us many sober lessons ; and yet men have expressed the wildest opinions about it. They have ventured to speak with certainty as to the time of the Saviour's return. They have pre-

sumed to fix the day and the year of His coming. And yet did not our Lord Himself declare that 'of that day and hour *knoweth no man*, no, not the angels of God, but my Father only?' And again, 'Watch, for *ye know neither the day nor the hour*, when the Son of Man cometh.'

Hence it is that that which is announced simply as a fact—one of the plainest facts of Revelation—has been made the subject of so many mere guesses and speculations, that men have come to regard it as something altogether uncertain and unreal.

I shall endeavour in these chapters to put aside everything that is merely speculative, and to take a sober, practical, and scriptural view of the Second Advent. And I think we shall find it full of comfort and encouragement to us in running our weary race on earth, and very quickening to our faith and love.

O God, prepare our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit, and enable us to welcome this, and

every other, truth which Thou hast revealed to us.

Let me, before going any further, point out to you a few passages in which our Lord's return is unmistakably spoken of. It will not be necessary that I should string together all the texts that I can find on this subject ; but I will merely select five, which seem to speak with the utmost plainness.

In St. Matthew, xvi. Christ declares concerning Himself, that 'the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His holy angels ; and then shall He reward every one according to his works.'

In St. John, xvi. we find our Lord comforting His disciples in the near prospect of His departure from them. And how does He console them ? He says, 'I go to prepare a place for you ; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.'

Again, at that wondrous moment when He was parted from His beloved followers, and ascended up out of their sight, two angels stood before them, and said, '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.'

St. Jude, in his Epistle, which was written long after the Saviour left this world, quoting the words of Enoch, declares, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints.'

And St. John, in the Book of the Revelation, says, 'Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him.'

Such passages as these put the matter beyond a doubt. It is clear that our Lord will come again. He Himself intended it, and spoke plainly about it; and He is 'not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent,' or change His purpose.

Yes, it is clear that He will come again, whatever indistinctness there may be as to the time and manner of His coming.

Now, every Bible-reader knows that this truth had such a hold on the minds of our Lord's immediate followers, that their constant attitude was that of expectancy, 'waiting for the Son of God from heaven,' and 'looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' This was the light that cheered them in their days of darkness. This was the great event, to which they looked forward with ceaseless expectation. They knew not *when* their Lord would come. It might, or it might not, be in their day. But that He *would* come they never for a moment doubted. And if the Church now was as much alive as it was then, if its faith and love were as strong, then would it be ever stretching out its arms towards the coming Saviour.

The return of the Son of God is the most glorious period the Christian can look for.

For since he loves his Saviour beyond all others; since to know Him, and to feel His power within, is his greatest enjoyment here; what must it be to behold Him, to see Him as He is, and to enjoy His very presence for ever? Around this great object therefore all his best thoughts and his fondest hopes gather. For the dawn of that day his longing eye looks out. His 'soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning.' As anxiously as the mariner on the wide sea, who has been buffeted by storms during a long and dark night, watches for the first sign of morning, hoping that it may discover to him some friendly sail, or some distant headland; as earnestly as the poor sleepless sufferer, lying upon his sick bed, counts the leaden hours as they slowly pass, and longs for daylight; so does the Christian Believer pant for the coming dawn, for the dayspring of that glorious morning which will usher in his dearest hopes. Though he has many comforts even

now to brighten his path, many blessings to cheer him as he journeys on, yet now it is night time with him, as compared with that brighter period which is to come. Every day and every hour is to him a step onward on his way to heaven ; and every day and every hour brings the Saviour nearer to him. He 'lifts up his head,' for his 'redemption (his perfect and complete redemption) draweth nigh.' 'Now is his salvation nearer than when he (first) believed.' The hours of darkness are coming to a close. There is a golden tinge upon the world's horizon, which marks the coming forth of the sun in his strength. 'The night is far spent : the day'—the long-wished-for day—'is at hand.'

CHAPTER II.

ADVENT A SUBJECT BOTH OF SORROW
AND JOY.

How different are our views on the subject of Advent! All depends on the state of mind we are in, and where our hopes are fixed. The very thought of the Saviour's coming calls forth a note of joy to some of us, but of woe to others. Which is it to you and me? How have we lived? How have we spent the night watches? How have we passed the time of our sojourning here? It has not, I trust, been a life of outward sin, nor stained by overt acts of crime; but it has perhaps been misspent, wasted, frittered away. Then we have nothing to look forward to, but to a day of

vengeance. We can but think with unmixed alarm of 'the great white throne, and Him that sitteth upon it,' who will reward every man according to his works. We think of 'the wrath (Oh what must it be?)—the wrath of the Lamb'—of that wounded, bleeding, patient Lamb of God, who has borne so long with us, but whom we have rejected. Ah, the world at large is slumbering. Most men are indifferent about the Saviour's approach. They are keenly alive about their worldly concerns; but they think little of Him. And so perhaps it will be up to the very day of Christ's return. It has often been remarked that the coldest hour of the twenty-four is that which immediately precedes the break of day. And perhaps the present coldness and unbelief may be the very harbingers of the Saviour's appearing; for does He not Himself lead us to expect this from the question He puts to us, 'When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?' And does He not still more

plainly declare, that as it was in the unbelieving days of Noah and Lot, 'even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed?'

To some then the Saviour's coming will be the signal of woe. But it need not be so with us; for however great our sins may have been, the Sin-bearer now stands before us with open arms. We have incurred a debt; but payment has been made. A sore disease cleaves to us; but 'is there no balm in Gilead; is there no Physician here?' Is there not a living voice which says, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee; go in peace;' 'I, even I, am He that blotteth out as a thick cloud thy transgressions and as a cloud thy sins?'

It is high time to awake out of sleep; to lay aside our worldliness, and rise to newness of life; to cast off the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light.

The thought of our Lord's coming suggests the need of a thorough change, a saving

change, of heart and life. Are we in a state to receive Him? Death may be on its way to us. Christ may be coming. Are we ready?

Think of that person who devotes himself day and night to his worldly calling; who rises early, and late takes rest, to amass together a few pounds; whose thoughts and desires seldom rise higher than this world. Is he ready? With all his energy and activity, with all his forethought and carefulness, is he ready? No; in his pursuit of gain he has forgotten that he has been laying up treasure 'in a bag with holes;' he has been 'labouring for the meat that perisheth;' he has perhaps gained the world, but lost his soul.

Or look at that pleasure-seeker, that busy idler, who runs to and fro for enjoyment, and yet never obtains it, who lives to gratify an appetite which is never satisfied. For I would say to every one who is living for mere self-enjoyment, Do you find content-

ment in your pleasures? There may be joy and merriment for a time—I do not deny it—but do they leave no sting behind them? or if not a sting, do they not leave a void in the heart, an absence of that peace which alone is worth having?

The more empty and superficial a heart is the more does pleasure, however trifling, take hold of it. We know that there are shoals in the fullest rivers. And so too there are shallow places in all our hearts; and these are the spots where worldly pleasure finds its footing; but the pleasures which rest there have at best but a feeble hold of us, they are soon gone.

If then you are one of these pleasure-seekers, I ask you to pause in the midst of your light-heartedness, and tell me, Are you ready for the Saviour's appearing—ready, if He should come, as He assuredly will come, unexpectedly?

But to those who love the Saviour, and are living upon Him, the Advent is a subject of joy. They look forward to it with happy feelings, and long for the Saviour's coming. They have followed Him here on earth, and their earnest desire is to see Him as He is, and to be with Him for ever.

But even such persons have reason to ask themselves, Am I ready? There are some even of God's children, who would I think answer, I am not *quite* ready—not *completely* prepared. They feel that although it has been the prevailing desire of their hearts to do their Saviour's will, and to work for Him, alas, much has been left undone! They have served Him, but how poorly! They have loved Him, but it has been far too coldly. They almost tremble to meet Him. Their language is, 'O spare us a little, that we may recover our strength, before we go hence.' They would like a little warning, it may be, a little time for brightening up their armour, a few

Advent a Subject of Sorrow and Joy. 19

days or weeks for getting ready to meet their Lord.

And yet we ought to be ready ; for 'the night is far spent : the day is at hand.' The morning is already breaking. The first symptoms of dawn are already showing themselves. Oh let us wake up. Let us trim our lamps. Let us live from day to day as if we felt the closing hour to be near. Let us sit loose upon the present world, which we are so soon to quit. If we want to be among those to whom the Lord's coming will be welcome, we must put ourselves often in His presence. We must draw very near to Him. We must walk with Him. We must hold intercourse with Him. We must treat Him as a Friend, and not a Stranger. We must hide ourselves in His very bosom, so that when He whispers to us, 'Surely I come quickly, we may be ready from our hearts to reply, 'Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus.'

And if you really wish to live a holier and more devoted life, go forthwith, and ask God

to give you grace and power to do so. Draw near to that Saviour, who is ever ready to receive you. Beseech Him never to leave you, but to make you His, unmistakably His, for ever.

CHAPTER III.

OUR PRESENT LIFE OF EXPECTATION.

‘OCCUPY till I come,’ was the Nobleman’s charge to his servants, when he ‘went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.’ And such is our Lord’s charge to us ; for He it is who is pictured to us under the likeness of that Nobleman. Jesus is now away from us, in the ‘far country ;’ but He bids us live an active life during His absence, and holds out to us the happy prospect of His return.

Now, are we living as with this prospect in view ? What is the kind of life that most people lead ? I am speaking of those who bear the name of Christians, and profess to be followers of our Lord.

The usual standard that men are content

to reach is about this—Whatever be their worldly calling, they follow it heartily : they do not think of neglecting it. It is an understood thing that their worldly business should be done well ; and therefore they set about it with honesty and vigour. They are also anxious to discharge conscientiously all the relations of life. And more than this, there is a certain prescribed routine of religious duty, which they are careful not to neglect ; such as the daily reading of the Bible—a regular observance of stated times for private Prayer—such occasional conversation as shows an interest in religion, and in the work of the Church to which they are attached—regular attendance also on the means of grace, and some degree of enjoyment in Public Worship.

This I conceive is the staple of most persons' lives. Such is the average amount of religiousness among Christians in the present day. They avoid sin, and shrink from its very touch. They accept the gospel

of Christ : they do not rebel against it. They think now and then of death and judgment : they by no means thrust it aside. The idea of a Saviour is something necessary to them : they would not for worlds give it up. They have a sort of traditionary regard for that Saviour, and a kind of undefined trust in Him. They like to hear of His sacrifice ; and they fully purpose to rely upon it when death draws near.

Such is the beaten track that most Christians walk in ; and we are so accustomed to see them walking in it, that we take it as a matter of course, and are perhaps ourselves content that our religion should be cast in the same mould.

But is this a really religious life ? Is there any self-denial here, any striving to enter in at the strait gate ? We speak of Prayer ; but is there any wrestling with God, saying, ‘I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me ?’ We speak of a better life to come ; but is there any taking of ‘the kingdom

of heaven by force,' any yielding of ourselves to God, any crucifixion of self, any rising with Christ, any walking 'as seeing Him who is invisible?'

Men rarely lead now the life that Enoch led of old, or Abraham, or Daniel. They do not lead the Christ-like life of the early soldiers of the cross. But surely, if we were watching, waiting, looking for the Saviour's coming, we should be living very differently ; our standard would be much higher, and our aim more heavenly ; our life would be 'hid with Christ in God,' so that 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory.'

Jesus says to each of us, 'Occupy till I come ;' and every true Christian should echo back a hearty response, saying, 'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark.

In order to carry out such a resolution, no motive is so constraining, and no stimulus

so powerful, as the ever-present conviction of our Lord's coming.

It will be well to bear in mind these four things,—

1. That our time is short; perhaps very short.
2. That we have a great work to do.
3. That we are the servants of a heavenly Master.
4. That we have a Saviour, whom we shall soon meet.

1. *Our time is short.* There are twelve hours in the day—only twelve. And when that twelfth hour comes, many an one feels, 'Oh that a little more time were given me! The world has claimed too much of my heart, and of my energies. I have lived too much for myself, and for my family—too much for gain, and too little for God. And now my opportunities are gone; my term is over; my little day of probation is ended.'

Yes, the time is very short. There is no room for waste, no margin for trifles. Eternity presses upon us. The Lord is at hand.

The Judge standeth at the door. The Master will soon come, and reckon with His servants.

2. We have *a great work to do*. We have our families to provide for, and the duties of our calling to discharge; for the Christian must not neglect these, and he must be but a poor Christian who does neglect them.

But besides this, there is a still greater work to do, in which God bears a part. And what is that? 'Only show it me,' say some, 'and I will gladly do it.' Well, what is it?

First of all, your own personal interest in the Saviour is to be secured. What is the inner history of your own soul? Is it in a safe and hopeful condition? Is Christ a Saviour to *you*? Have you gone to Him as a penitent Believer? Have you felt your sins to be your greatest misery; and have you put them from you, laying them down at the foot of the cross? Have you obtained pardon? And are you now walking with God, and leading a holy, believing, Christ-

ian life? Are you daily seeking to be more and more conformed to your Saviour's image? And is your own perverse will swallowed up in His? Can you say from your very heart, 'Christ is mine, and I am His?'

But it is not enough once for all to have given yourself to God—to have taken the bold step of surrendering yourself to Him, to be His servant and His son henceforth and for ever. The 'things behind' are to be 'forgotten,' and all your energies are to be bent on 'reaching forth unto those things that are before.' It is not enough to have 'received Christ Jesus the Lord,' you must 'walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him.' You must *act*, as well as *believe*. You must *exert* yourself for Him, as well as *trust* in Him. For the truest Christian is not one who feels that he has done much, but one who feels that he has still much to do. And here is the beautiful harmony of the gospel: it never bids us trust, so as to dispense with exertion; nor does it ever lead us to think

that exertion can remove the necessity for trust.

You have now before you the formation of a Christian character for eternity, the moulding of your heart according to the heavenly pattern. There must be a living by rule; a daily subduing of self; a correction of this and that evil within you; a pressing after holiness; a growing up unto Christ in all things; a prayerful waiting upon Him; a close communion with Him; a constant advance in short towards perfection. For what lower aim does our Lord set before us? Does He not say, 'Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father in heaven is perfect?'

Now, all this is quite consistent with your life in the world. To lead a holy and heavenly life, we need not shut the door upon our fellow-men, and live a life apart and solitary. You may be a cheerful, happy, and useful member of society, and yet a holy and devoted Christian. What a mistake to suppose, as some do, that if we are to live

a really religious life, we must needs be shut out from intercourse with our fellow-men. We have nothing of this in the Bible. There is not in the gospel one single obligation for such a life. The Apostles did not retire from the outer world. Tryphena and Triphosa, and the beloved Persis were not recluses. The Saviour's prayer for His own was not that His Father would take them out of the world, but that He would keep them from its evils. The world is our great battle-field. There our warfare is to be waged, and our victories won.

You may be an able politician, or a successful merchant, or a diligent tradesman, or a faithful and active servant; and at the same time your great end may be the service and glory of God. Religion need not be rudely forced into our ordinary concerns; but it should run like a thread of gold through the whole texture of our every-day life, to enrich and beautify it with its presence. As to whether, and how far, it is

well for one in earnest to fall in with the ways of the world, and to mix in its gaieties, I feel that it is of little use to lay down rules. But of this I am sure, that if our hearts are really given to God, if we have indeed tasted that He is gracious, our capacity for enjoyment will be of so much higher a stamp than this world can supply, that we shall feel its pleasures to be unsatisfying, and its companionship uncongenial. Only that which savours of heaven can really fill a heaven-born soul.

The sort of life then, which I have sketched out, and nothing lower than this, will be the sort of life we shall lead if the Saviour's coming has its due influence upon us.

Then again, there should be some *special work for God*, which is occupying you. You should endeavour to be doing something from time to time either for the building up of His Church, or for the good of His people, or for the furtherance of His glory. Try to be useful in your day,

and to be a blessing in your neighbourhood. Fill your proper place in the Christian body ; and remember that the very humblest of us has some post to occupy, and some work to do, for Christ. And if we really love our Saviour, we shall feel that we cannot do enough for Him who has done so much for us. Surely, when we come to die, there will be with most of us a feeling of regret that so little has been done, or rather, so little attempted, for our Lord.

Work then heartily for Him ; and though, after all your past endeavours, you may feel conscious that you are doing but little, and that little most unworthily ; still, if you do it heartily unto the Lord, He will say to you at His coming, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

There is a Latin proverb, '*Dum vivimus, vivamus*'—'Whilst living, let us live.' The

Christian's is the only true life; for he lives with the highest end in view. He lives for Christ: he lives for eternity. Oh let this life be ours. Let our motto be, 'This one thing I do.' 'I press toward the mark.' Let holiness be our aim; the furtherance of God's glory our object; and heaven the goal we long to reach.

3. We are *the servants of a heavenly Master*. We are accountable to Him for every action—for the employment of our time, not devoting too much to self, or to the world, not wilfully wasting a particle of it, but 'gathering up the fragments, that nothing be lost'—for the expenditure of our money; for whether it be much or little, it is only lent to us by God, and to Him we are accountable for what we expend and what we withhold.

You should remember all the day long that you are a pledged servant of Christ—not your own, but His. And as you go about the world, you should bear in mind that His mark

is upon you, and that His eye follows you wherever you are—that eye of love, which, whilst it marks your steps, and takes note of every act, is quick to discern all your need, and to notice every humble endeavour to do His will.

It would be well, I think, when we first rise in the morning, to encourage some such thought as this—‘I have a Master in heaven; to serve Him is my duty; to obey Him is my delight; to love Him is my privilege. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? Teach me to know Thy will, and to carry it out this day.’

Then again, it would be well to pause now and then during the twelve hours, and ask ourselves, ‘Am I trying to please my heavenly Master? Am I endeavouring to do His work? Is my life a life given to Him? Is it my meat and drink to serve Him in the world?’

And further on, ere the day closes, we should question ourselves as to whether any duty has been left undone, and whether any

work has been accomplished for God? Whether we ourselves are nearer to Him, and whether others have been brought nearer by our influence and example?

4. There is yet another great truth we should have constantly in our minds, namely, that *we have a Saviour to meet*, and that perhaps very soon—a Saviour who has greatly loved us, and therefore claims all our love in return—one who is also our Judge, and will therefore reckon with us—our Master, who has entrusted many talents to our keeping, and will demand them of us. We are to meet Him; and surely that meeting cannot be a happy one, if He is still a Stranger to us. We must know Him. It is not enough to understand His gospel; to have clear views of His atonement; to be persuaded that we can only be saved by Him; to be able to speak, or even to preach about Him so as to win others over to His service. We must know Him by the inward teaching of His Spirit, by the revealing

of Himself to our souls as He does not unto the world. And further, we must love Him, better than friends or brethren; so that we may be able to say from our very hearts, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with Thee.' Thus only can we meet Him with joy. Thus only shall we be ready for our Lord's coming. Thus only shall we 'love His appearing.'

Who of us is living this holy, watchful, prepared life—this heavenly life—this higher life in Christ? And yet it ought to be ours; and more, it may be ours.

May God, by His Holy Spirit, so stir your heart, that you may be ready to say, 'This life shall be my aim in future. I will ask God to pardon my unpreparedness, my half-heartedness, my too great conformity to this world. I will ask Him to draw my heart towards Himself, and to make me more thoroughly and entirely His; so that if I die, I may wake up after my Saviour's likeness; or if He

should find me alive at His coming, I may be caught up with Him in the air, never more to be separated from Him.'

I hope that I have not discouraged you by what I have said in this chapter. Some may think that I have made the way too narrow, and the gate too strait. But, believe me, it is a straitness and a narrowness marked out for us by a loving Father, who knows that in that path alone is safety and peace for His children. I have taken a high standard for the Christian. But could I have taken a lower, and yet be faithful? No, this I believe is the Scripture standard. And of this I am sure, that if we honestly and heartily desire to reach it, God will help us even beyond our expectations. He will mould us into His own image, and make us all that He would have us to be.

CHAPTER IV.

ADVENT CLAIMS.

WHAT should be our feelings and our manner of living in the prospect of our Lord's coming? Or, in other words, what are the claims which the Saviour's Advent has upon us? We have a crucified Saviour, a risen and ever-living Saviour, a returning Saviour; what does He claim from us?

These are questions which I propose to answer. May God help me to do so!

1st. Our absent Lord claims our *faith*.

When Jesus was here on earth, it was not easy to become His follower. There was much to be given up. His disciples were called upon to turn their backs, in some cases, upon those who were dearest to

them; to part with their possessions; to endure hardships; to bear reproach; to suffer for His sake. This I say was not easy: it required no small amount of grace. It is true that we in the present day are spared many of these difficulties; but the same spirit of self-denial, and the same willingness to suffer, are required of us now. And then, whilst *they* served a Lord whose actual presence they enjoyed, *we* serve One who is away from us, out of sight; we are called to exercise the most difficult of all Christian graces, the grace of *faith*; 'Whom, having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

Our Lord's bodily presence is in heaven; but He is here among us in spirit. He is in the assemblies of His people. He is with them when alone. He is nigh unto them when they call upon Him, whether it be in their great emergencies, or in the little trials of their every-day life. He is with them in the

fiery furnace, as He was with His servants of old. He is with them in the midst of their busy engagements. He is with them *always*, even unto the end of the world. And it was with this promise that He consoled His followers, when they were cast down at the prospect of His departure, saying, 'I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me,'—you, my believing people, still behold me with the eye of faith, ever near you.

But further, He promised to return to them, not merely for a few resurrection days, but for a lengthened time, and in a glorious manner; 'Ye now, therefore, have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.' 'I will come again, and receive you unto myself.'

In the meantime He claims our *faith*. He bids us trust Him, though we see Him not; lean upon Him in our way through the

wilderness ; cling to Him in all our dangers ; walk, in short, 'as seeing Him who is invisible.'

But more than this, He vouchsafes to dwell within the true Believer's soul. 'Abide,' He says, 'in me, and I in you.' 'I am the vine ; ye are the branches.' And again He says, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.'

Is Christ thus formed within us ? Can we say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me ?' I am afraid we are too often led aside by what is tangible and visible. Our business, for instance, is something that the eye and the hand have to do with ; and therefore we can throw ourselves heartily into it. Our Friends around us we can see and hear, and our hearts go out towards them. And thus

we get drawn aside from higher things, which, though unseen, are not the less real.

Yes, and even religious people are very liable to rest on things seen. For instance, a Church is to be built: we can picture to ourselves the laying of the foundation, and the rising up of the walls, and so we engage in the undertaking. A Fund is to be raised for some religious object: it is a matter of money, and but little faith is needed. Again we are called to Public Worship; and go without much difficulty, for we meet our fellow Christians, and the very sympathy of numbers animates us. We behold the Preacher, and hear his living voice, and we are satisfied.

But remember, these are the outer parts of religion, the scaffolding. There is however an inner service which Christ claims from us, and which it is far harder to give. To kneel down in our solitary room, and speak with God—to hold communion with Christ and to realise His nearness,—to act all

the day as if He were by our side—to run the Christian race looking unto Jesus—to have our eye ever turned towards the cross—to rejoice in a risen and ascended Saviour, and to be anxiously looking for His return to us—this is simple *faith*, such faith as we do not naturally possess, and which can only come into our hearts from above, the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

2ndly. Our absent Lord claims *our loving allegiance*. He will not be satisfied with anything short of it. We may obey Him. We may strictly observe His laws. We may 'render Him the calves of our lips.' We may fear to offend Him. We may fight manfully for His cause. We may be active in labouring for Him. But having done all, He will not be satisfied, except we *love* Him. His demand is, 'My son, give me thy heart,'—not thy lips, nor thy hands, but thy very heart. He inquires of us, as He did of His fallen disciple, 'Lovest thou me?' And happy for

us, if we can answer, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'

Our love should be shown by our joyful attendance in His courts, where He specially promises to meet us, according to the advice of the Apostle, 'not forsaking the assembly of yourselves together; and so much the more as ye see *the day* (the Advent Day) approaching.'

But there is a special ordinance, in the observance of which our love is peculiarly shown; and which may truly be called an Advent Ordinance. 'Do this (said our Lord, when He gave us Bread and Wine for our future spiritual nourishment) in remembrance of me'—of me, your absent Lord—of me, your returning Saviour. And are we not reminded by the Apostle, that as often as we do this, we 'do show the Lord's death till He come?'

When He ordained the Holy Supper, His thoughts evidently stretched forward to that glorious time when He should return again to His beloved people. It was to be a kind

of link to bind together His First and Second Advent. At His First Advent He 'was once offered to bear the sins of many : ' but at His Second Advent He will 'appear without sin (that is, without any sin-offering) unto salvation.'

Meanwhile we are openly to keep up the remembrance of Him in this particular Ordinance. We are to go on feeding by faith on His Body and Blood, year after year, and age after age, up to a definite period—'till He come.' And then He Himself will feed us, and bid us sit down with Him to the Marriage Supper in heaven.

Oh that in this, and every other way, we may show our deep affection towards the Saviour—the living, loving, personal Saviour ! Then will our feelings, our desires, our motives, be all quickened. Christ's ordinances will be our great enjoyment, because in them we shall draw near to Him. We shall go cheerfully on our way, because it will be our delight to follow Him. We shall serve Him faith-

fully, because He will be dear to us. Love will expel all our selfishness. It will be the secret spring moving us on, 'constraining us no longer to live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again.'

3rdly. Our absent Lord claims *our watchfulness*. He tells us that He is coming; but He purposely keeps us in ignorance as to the time. 'Watch,' He says, 'for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh.'

The Sentinel watches, lest he and his comrades be taken off their guard. The Husbandman watches the first approach of spring to cast in his seed. The loving Wife watches her husband's footsteps as he draws near his home. And shall not we watch? Shall we not be like the Wise Virgins, all eager to welcome the Bridegroom's coming? Shall we slumber, when One so great, and so glorious is at hand?

Ah, we have great need to watch; for Satan

is ready to mislead us ; and the world is ready with its enticements ; and our evil hearts are only too ready to be drawn aside from the right path. We must watch lest we lose what we have gained ; for as in the winter the least exposure to cold chills the blood in our veins, so if we are off our guard for an instant we may lose the little warmth which has been kindled within our souls by the Spirit of God.

Let us be careful then. Let us walk warily through the world. Let us be like servants who wait and watch for the coming of their Lord, 'that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.'

These are some of the claims that our absent Lord has upon us now in the prospect of His return. And truly they are blessed claims, which it is our happiness to meet ; and which we can only meet by His grace working within us. But I shall have occasion to speak of additional claims in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V.

FURTHER CLAIMS.

TO give our Lord the simple faith and confidence of our hearts—to render Him our true and loving obedience—and to be ever watching and waiting for His promised return—all this He claims of each one of His servants, whatever be their position in life. But He has further claims upon us, two of which I will now mention.

He claims *consistency of conduct* for His people—not merely occasional warmth of feeling, or a bold confession, or interest in His work; but such consistency of conduct and character, and such steady, persevering devotedness of heart and life, as at once stamps us as His disciples. We must ‘live soberly, right-

cously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' 'Our conversation' (or manner of life) must be 'in heaven,' from whence also we look for the Saviour.

Holiness of life is what men expect of us, if we are the servants of Christ. They look for it in us, and they may justly complain, if they find it not. And does not our Lord expect it also? It is the spot by which He knows His people. He bids them to be holy as He is holy. The world's sin is hateful to Him; but what grieves Him most is the sin of His own people. This is the sharp spear that pierces His riven side. These are the nails that tear His very heart.

Oh for a nearer, closer, holier walk with Christ, desiring in all things to do His will, living upon Him from day to day, and honouring Him by a devoted life in the midst of this God-forgetting world!

Further, our absent Lord claims from us *an interest in all that concerns His kingdom here on earth*—that kingdom, the foundation of which was laid at the cost of His own blood, and for the advancement of which His soul yearns.

We must not only take an interest in the establishment of this kingdom, but we must lay ourselves out to further its prosperity and enlargement. In Matt. xxiv., where Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem, and also of His own Second Appearing, He says, 'This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations ; and then shall the end come.'

Now, this was partly fulfilled by the proclamation of the gospel throughout Judæa, and the countries of the then known world, by the first followers of our Lord. But it yet remains to be more *fully* accomplished, by the sounding forth of that gospel through every nation of the earth, by the mouth of the Christian missionary.

We may gather from the Saviour's words, that as the end draws near, the Church will be seen as 'an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and people, saying, Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come.' Then will those great nations of the earth, like China, and India, and the tribes of Africa, who have as yet heard but the faint whispers of the God of Love—here and there a feeble voice sounding in a remote corner—they shall all hear the message; and if they reject it, they shall be henceforth and for ever without excuse. The people that have long sat in darkness will then see something more than the scattered rays of a distant light. The Sun of Righteousness will rise before them in all His fulness, as the 'light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel.' Every Christian will be as it were a herald of salvation, and will go forth

among the heathen, waving aloft the banner of the cross, and declaring once more that 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Do not mistake me ; I would not have you suppose that the whole world will be converted before the Lord's coming. There is no Scriptural authority for such an expectation. On the contrary, Jesus Himself leads us to expect a different state of things at His return ; for He asks, 'When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth ?

Observe the terms in which He speaks of this general publication of His gospel ; 'It shall be preached *for a witness*;' so that, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear to hear, they will have no ground for excuse. The unbelieving will have their opportunity, though, alas ! a wasted one ; and God's people will be enlisted as His followers against the great day. 'And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven ; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn ; and they shall see the Son of

Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.'

Your duty is plain. Your Advent call is clear—to take some part, and a decided part, in this glorious proclamation of the Saviour's kingdom.

Are Ministers alone to concern themselves about the spread of the gospel? Are they only to sound the silver trumpet, announcing the year of jubilee? Are theirs the only 'beauteous feet' that are to stand upon the mountains, bringing good tidings, and publishing peace? No; it is the blessed privilege of *all*. They are the leaders: you the helpers. They are the mouthpiece of Christ: but the gospel tidings should find a ready echo in your hearts. They are officers in the conquering army: you are, each one of you, the pledged soldiers of the cross.

Then, go forth to your work. You need not go far to find it. There is enough to do around you, and within your reach. The harvest is great ; the battle is the Lord's. Use your earnest endeavours, your best energies, to build up the Church of Christ in your family, among your friends, in your neighbourhood, in the world at large. Wherever there is a soul to be saved, a flock to be gathered, a faithful Minister to uphold, step forward and say, 'Here am I, Lord ; be pleased to give me a part in the great work.' Count it as your privilege, your highest honour, to take some share in this most blessed task. Leave it not to others, but move in it yourself.

Above all, see that the kingdom of God is 'within you.' Let your own light shine. Adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour by a holy and devoted life ; for nothing will help forward more effectually than this the great work of preparation for the coming of the Lord.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TIME OF OUR LORD'S COMING.

IN my previous chapters, I have pointed out to you the absolute *certainly* of our Lord's coming ; what our lives should be with this prospect before us ; and what are some of the principal claims that our absent Saviour has upon us, in view of His re-appearing.

The question now comes before us. WHAT WILL BE THE TIME of our Lord's coming? When will He return ? I have already stated that the *exact period* of the Second Advent is a matter purposely concealed from us. It is one of the 'secret things,' which 'belong unto the Lord our God.' And Christ Himself has said, 'Of that day and hour knoweth no man, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.' To limit and define then the precise

period would be a daring and vain attempt. But there are certain precursors—certain admonitory signs—which we are not only permitted, but bound, to take note of. Let us see if we can gather up some of these.

We learn from Matt. xxiv. that on the eve of our Lord's Advent there will be *great Convulsions* both in the material, and also in the political, world; 'Ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled. For all these must come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places.'

There will be a period too of *severe Trial*, as if to sift men and to test their faith; 'Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.'

The Church of God will doubtless turn

these events to profit. She will buckle on her armour. She will be more than ever anxious to do the work entrusted to her, knowing that the time is short. Especially will she use her influence for men's conversion. There will probably be a mighty change, a great spiritual revival, among the Jews. They will be led by the power of the Holy Spirit to believe that Jesus is the true Messiah. And they, when converted, will scatter blessings among their Gentile brethren.

Oh what an accession will there be to our feeble missionary army, when the Jews shall thus flock into our ranks as the heralds of the gospel, 'preaching the faith which they once destroyed.' We can imagine with what enlightened zeal and burning love they would proclaim that Saviour, whom they will then feel to be unspeakably precious to them—how eagerly they would confess Him, whom they had so long denied. One can imagine too how great would be the effect of their exertions; for 'if the fall of them has been

the riches of the world, how much more their fulness!' 'And if the casting away of them has been the reconciling of the world, what shall the reviving of them be but life from the dead?' And remember, God is able to work such a change in that once blind and unbelieving nation, that they will press eagerly into the Redeemer's kingdom. And it assuredly will be so, for has He not plainly declared by His Apostle, that 'All Israel shall be saved?'

Whether this stripping off the veil from the Jewish mind—this awakening of those who have been so long slumbering in unbelief—this conviction in the heart of those, who have for centuries obstinately denied the Lord that bought them—whether this shall take place before the Lord's coming, or shall be one of the miraculous effects of His actual appearing, I do not attempt to determine, for the word of God speaks but sparingly on the subject. I am inclined however to believe the former; and think that there will be a

great awakening among God's Ancient People preparatory to the time of the Advent, and that the abundant blessings showered down upon them will be felt also by the Gentile world. It will however still be only a partial conversion, a gathering in of God's elect to welcome that coming event. The whole nation may perhaps nominally embrace Christianity ; but a portion only will really accept Christ, and find salvation in Him.

But we are told of another thing that will come to pass. There will be a great *Falling away* from the faith of Christ ; 'Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many'—of many who seemed to be true disciples—'shall wax cold.' St. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, enters somewhat more into detail about this great Apostasy, or falling away from the faith. He thus warns the Church ; 'Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord

Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he that now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall censure with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.'

The great enemy has from the very first sown tares of various kinds among the wheat; but it seems as though he would reserve his most poisonous seed to the last. In the first ages of the Church Socinian error crept in, and prevailed. Next the False Prophet had his sway. Then for many centuries Romanism has kept numbers bound by its chains. Even now there are many

Antichrists. But the Great Apostasy will be reserved to the last; and that will be a deadlier than all. It will probably be some form of Infidelity, which will carry captive its millions, and from which none will be preserved but those who are living very close to God—‘kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation.’

One shudders to think of such a period; when Jesus shall perhaps be disowned by the great ones of the earth; when His name shall be openly dishonoured; and when the subtle temptations of the evil one will reach even the hearts of those whom we were wont to regard as true Believers.

Oh that, if this evil should come in our day, we may have our footing firm upon the rock!

These then are some of the main events which are to *precede* the Lord’s coming. And many an earnest Christian is ready to ask, ‘Are not these signs apparent among us

in the present day? The gospel has been preached in many lands. We hear of great changes in the world, vast commotions among the nations, wars and rumours of wars. Iniquity abounds among our teeming populations. Infidelity presents a bolder front than heretofore. The report of earthquakes and national disasters are continually reaching us. Surely the end is near.' It may be so. God forbid that any of us should shut our eyes against 'the signs of the times.' God forbid that we should be deaf to the sounds of the Saviour's approach, or be too ready to cast a slight on those who seem to see the first streaks of the coming dawn. But are we not somewhat apt to imagine that events of ordinary occurrence are confined to our own little day, and that there is something special about our own times? Let us not then be too ready to infer that the Day is close at hand.

Our duty however is most clear. We should ever be on our watch-tower. And

since we are told that our Lord will come as a thief in the night (that is, suddenly and unexpectedly), our wisdom is to be in a state of readiness. We know neither the day nor the hour when the *summer* will burst forth ; but do not men carefully mark the changes in the seasons, and prepare for them ? And ought *we* to be less on our guard, when such vast interests as I have described are at stake ?

But it may be asked, When our Lord left this world, did He not promise *soon* to return ? And did not His disciples seem to have expected Him to appear even in their own day ? But He still tarries ; He comes not. Undoubtedly our Lord's words were, ' Surely I come *quickly*.' How can we reconcile this with His being so long in coming ?

In the first place, it seemed but a short time to Him. Things are long or short, great or small, by comparison. To the

little Ant that runs to and fro, building up its tiny hill, that hill seems like a mountain or a world. To the Butterfly that sports in the summer sunshine, the few days of its quickly passing life appear like an age. And so it is in a measure with ourselves. We are accustomed to reckon by days, and months, and years; and a lifetime seems very long indeed. But Jesus is the Lord of eternity. He can look back on ages and generations at a glance. With Him years are but as minutes, and hundreds of years but as a few short hours. He does not measure time as we measure it, nor look at it as we look at it. 'One day is with Him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'

But there is yet another thought that has been long in my mind. Jesus says, 'Surely I come quickly.' And perhaps He would have come long and long ago, but for our sin and unbelief, which have kept Him back. You remember that we

are told on one occasion that the Saviour 'could do no miracles' because of the unbelief which prevailed. And may it not also be said that He could not return to us, because of our lack of faith and readiness to receive Him ?

If men had been more watchful, and less worldly—if they had believed His word more—if they had done the work more heartily, which He set them to do—then perhaps He would have come before this ; for then the world would have been ready for His return, and His people would have been more eager to receive Him.

It may be that this is the reason why the Lord delayeth His coming, why He puts off His visit to this faithless world. And if so, it ought indeed to fill us with shame and sorrow ; and lead us to cry out with all earnestness, 'Lord, pardon the sin of Thy Church ; pardon our own individual sins ; prepare us for Thine appearing, and so hasten Thy coming and Thy kingdom.'

When the Saviour made His first appearance among us, there was the same delay, the same tarrying ; and it was not till 'the fulness of the time was come' that He paid us His wondrous visit. And so, 'when the fulness of time is come'—in God's own time—at the proper moment—when the world is ready for Him, and the harvest of the earth is ripe—He will appear again ; and not one instant before.

In answer then to the important question, When will the Lord come ? I would say the precise period is purposely hidden from us ; but certain events are mentioned as preparatory to His return ; such as great commotions in the world, a time of severe trial for the Church, the conversion of the Jewish Nation, the Great Apostasy, &c. We should carefully and prayerfully watch these 'signs of the times,' so as to be ever in a condition of readiness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MANNER OF OUR LORD'S COMING.

THAT Jesus *will* come again is an assured truth. There is no room whatever for doubt. But *how* He will come is a matter about which there is much mystery. We may gather however a few particulars.

1. He will come *in person*. At His ascension it was declared to the gazing crowd that '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.' He ascended, not in idea, but in person; and so, 'in like manner,' will He return.

Again, He ascended *in the sight of many beholders*, and so will it be at His reappearance.

ance. Nay, it will be a fuller and more general manifestation. Our Lord Himself declares, in Matt. xxiv., 'Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth *see* the Son of Man coming.' When standing as a prisoner before Caiaphas, He spoke thus; 'I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye *see* the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' And still more clearly is it declared in Rev. i., 'Behold He cometh with clouds, *and every eye shall see Him.*' And if it be asked, How can this be? my answer is, His coming will of course be miraculous. And as the electric flash in an instant illuminates the whole expanse of the heavens, so, but in a far greater degree, will it be with our Lord's appearing before a waiting world; 'As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.'

2ndly. He will return to *this earth*, from whence He ascended. This was Job's creed, and Job's consolation; 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day *upon the earth.*' Zachariah seems to mark the Holy Land as the very place of His reappearance; 'His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives.' It was an ancient opinion, founded probably upon this passage, that our Lord would appear on earth on the very spot from which He ascended to heaven; that He would appear as a Judge in the same part of the world in which He appeared as a Redeemer; and that, like the sun in its westward career, He too would 'rejoice as a giant to run His course,' triumphing over His enemies, and gladdening the hearts of His people—thus fulfilling the words of Ezekiel, 'Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east; and his voice was like a noise of many waters, and the earth shined with his glory.'

And this leads me to observe, 3rdly, that Christ's coming will be *in glory*. I need say little on this head; it is so universally believed that our Lord's return will be in great majesty and power.

His first coming was in lowliness and poverty. He humbled Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant; walking up and down this world 'despised and rejected of men;' having no form nor comeliness—a mark for the sharp arrows of the ungodly, and the object of their unbelieving scorn. But when He comes again, it will be altogether different. 'Then, (as He Himself foretells) shall the Son of Man come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him.' He will then be as one highly exalted, the beloved of His Father, the Head of His ransomed Church, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to whom every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

I might allude to many more particulars, which are sometimes stated almost at a venture, regarding the manner of our Lord's coming; but as I wish to confine myself only to what is clearly revealed in Scripture, I shall mention but one other before I close; namely, that our Lord will come *attended by His saved ones.*

Enoch spoke of this six thousand years ago; 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.' St. Paul speaks of 'the coming of the Lord with all his saints. And again he says, 'Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.'

Here the word of God is very clear. We may gather from it that there will first be a Resurrection of the saints. All who have died in the Lord, from the days of Adam and Enoch to the last saint who has been laid in his grave, all shall come forth, and shall form part of the Lord's glorious train. And afterwards those who are then living upon the earth shall be received and welcomed

by the saintly band, with Jesus at their head.

I am led to state thus much, for Scripture points the way. In 1 Thess. iv. it is written, 'This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord (we who shall be still living when He appears) shall not prevent (or take precedence of) those which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

And here I leave you, for the present, hoping yet to speak to you of THE OBJECT of our Lord's coming, and of the ETERNAL BLESSEDNESS which will follow.

I trust that what has come before us in this chapter has not merely awakened our curiosity, but has led us to inquire with all anxiety, Shall I be one of that glorious band, whom Christ will bring with Him? Am I one of the Lord's saints? Have I cast in my lot among His followers? And unworthy though I am to be called His disciple, am I trusting in His merits, humbly following the steps of His most holy life, desiring to do His will here, and to live with Him hereafter for ever? God grant that our secret answer may be such as He approves!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH OUR LORD WILL
COME.

IF we were told that a person was coming to our house, we should naturally ask, On what errand is he coming? For what purpose is his visit? And still more anxious should we be to know this, if he were a person of distinction, and one whom we had learnt to love and revere.

How important then is it to ascertain the object for which Christ will again appear among us! We all know for what purpose He came at the first. It was to save: His one great object was redemption. And for what purpose will He return ?

1. He will, at His appearing, subdue every foe: He will 'put down all enemies under His feet.' Oftentimes they appear now to have the upper hand. 'They wear out the saints of the Most High.' They speak great swelling words against the Lord and against His anointed. They seem to triumph, but it is only for a little moment. The time is at hand, when 'the Lord will speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure,' having set Christ 'as king upon his holy hill of Zion.'

One great act will be to put down that *Wicked One*, that antichristian and infidel power, of which I spoke in the last chapter. For although no fear of man will be able to daunt him, and our words will be altogether powerless to check him in his deadly attack, the very appearance of that Saviour, before whom the whole band of soldiers in Gethsemane fell to the ground,—His very appearance will appal him, and the

breath of His lips will, as with a withering blast, annihilate him. For the Apostle declares that 'that Wicked,' who has been revealed, 'the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming;' just as the sun at its rising dispels the noxious vapours that have gathered in its absence.

But the Lord's destroying power will extend to others besides this 'man of sin'—to every opposer and unbeliever then upon earth. He will 'execute judgment upon all, and convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.' The Lord Jesus (says the Apostle to the Thessalonians) 'shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.' That will be the great 'day of vengeance' which the Prophet Isaiah foresaw, and of which

he speaks in that remarkable chapter, the sixty-third, saying, 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?' An answer comes, 'I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' Again, the question is asked, 'Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?' He answers, 'I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me. For I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment; for the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.'

And in this same character of the Avenger of His enemies, did He appear in a vision to St. John, as we read in Rev. xix.; 'He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood (not his own blood, but that of His con-

quered enemies), and His name is called the Word of God. And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.'

We *now* regard the Saviour as full of mercy and love, long-suffering and slow to anger, and ready to receive every sinner who repents and turns to Him. But *then* His opposers will behold wrath only and anger in that countenance. Every hope of pardon will be gone, every cry for mercy useless. His enemies shall lick the dust, and be awe-struck before Him. For '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, saith the Lord of Hosts.'

The unbelieving Jew, who would not have Jesus to reign over him, who drove the nails into His hands and feet: and every sinner

who since that time has crucified the Son of God afresh by his sins, will behold Him and mourn; for 'the day of His wrath is come.'

2. But the Lord has another object for which He will appear—an object far more in accordance with His own loving heart—an object for which He sighed, and groaned, and toiled, and suffered in the days of His flesh, when He foresaw 'the travail of his soul, and was satisfied,' even in the midst of His bitterest pangs. Yes, He will come, as it is written, '*to be glorified in his saints*, and to be admired in all them that believe.' And then 'He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other;' and 'so shall they ever be with the Lord.'

This will be the most glorious assembling that has ever taken place—the gathering of God's elect, 'from the four winds, from

one end of heaven to the other'—the meeting together for the first time of Patriarchs and Prophets, of Saints and Apostles—of the Church of God—His glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle—'the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.' And then too will those words of the Prophet be fulfilled, 'The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess it for ever, even for ever and ever.'

3. But there will be a third and most important feature connected with our Lord's Second Advent, namely, the summoning of the nations to a *formal Judgment*. So important does our Church consider this to be, that in her estimation it seems to swallow every other object. In two of the Advent Collects she refers to it, as if it were the one main purpose for which Christ will come. In the first Collect she speaks of 'the last day, when He shall come again in His

glorious majesty *to judge both the quick and the dead.*' And in the third Collect she bids us pray to Jesus 'that at His second coming *to judge the world* we may be found an acceptable people.'

It is clear that there will be a Universal Judgment, a great Assize. There are two leading passages in which this is clearly set forth. The first is in St. Matt. xxv. where our Lord says, 'When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory : and before Him shall be gathered all nations ; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.' The other is that magnificent picture described by St. John as a part of his vision ; 'I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened : and another book was opened which is the

book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works.'

But here arises a little difficulty. At an earthly assize the judge carefully tries the prisoner who is brought before him, and gives his verdict accordingly. But can it be supposed that any such process will be gone through on that tremendous day? Is there any need for it? Cannot Christ form His judgment without it? Does he not read our hearts? And can He not tell at a glance who are His, and who are not? Certainly He can.

Again, is our fate to be decided only at the Judgment Day, and not till then? Is it to be a matter of uncertainty up to that eventful hour? And are we to stand trembling at Christ's tribunal, uncertain whether we are saved or lost? Surely not. The Lord sets His mark upon His own people *now*; and when they die, or when He comes, they will be welcomed at once into His

presence. 'Absent from the body,' they will be 'present with the Lord.' They will 'depart and be with Christ.'

Then if this be the case, is not the Judgment needless? Again I answer, Certainly not. I believe the matter stands thus—Our Lord at this moment knows perfectly who are on His side, and who are against Him. He says, 'I know my sheep, and am known of mine.' The great Judgment therefore will be held, not to ascertain who are Christ's and who are Satan's—not to weigh men in the balance, and discover then for the first time what they really are; but it will be held in order that before an assembled universe God's righteous sentence may be pronounced; and that Christ may *openly* welcome His beloved ones, and bid the wicked depart for ever from His presence.

And will it not, think you, increase the glory and joy of His people to be thus publicly owned by their Lord? And will it not add bitterness to the woe of the lost to

hear their eternal doom declared in the face of their fellow-men, as they stand ranged before the throne?

Ah, that will indeed be a solemn day. Try to realize it. Think of it often. And let it be your earnest prayer that you may be kept in constant readiness for it.

4. A fourth object for which Christ will come, will be *to reign*. Undoubtedly He reigns *now* in the hearts of His people; and He *will* reign hereafter in His eternal kingdom *for ever and ever*.

But it is declared that He will reign *here on earth*. We find these glowing words in Isa. xxiv., 'Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously;' and in Rev. xx., St. John declares that God 'hath made us kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth.'

It seems however that a certain *limit* is

given to this reign ; 'They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.' These thousand years will be a time of holiness here on earth—a millennium of blessedness—a reign of peace, for Satan shall be bound. Then shall be fulfilled the Prophet's words, 'The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.' 'Thy people also shall be all righteous.'

But further, we learn that, at the expiration of this blessed period Satan will again lift up his head, and iniquity shall once more gain the ascendancy. But thank God, it will be only 'for a little season.' As we sometimes see in the case of a person recovering from illness, the fever, which appeared to be subdued, suddenly returns, and makes a last effort to re-assert its lost power. But it is only for a while. The word of recovery is gone forth ; and health, restored health,

renewed health, assumes its superiority. And so will the reign of righteousness presently regain its sway, and Christ will reign for ever.

Now, there are many other details connected with this part of my subject, on which I have neither the wish, nor the time, now to dwell. The exact nature of this millennial reign—the scene of its prevalence—the persons who shall be privileged to partake of it—whether Martyrs only, or those who are counted worthy to share the Martyrs' crown—the period at which it is to begin—whether its duration will be a literal 'thousand years,' or not—these, and many other questions, are most deeply interesting. But persons of thoughtful and devout minds have differed so much as to their interpretation, that I prefer to leave them, until it may perhaps please God to give His people more light to guide them through this deeply mysterious portion of His revealed truth.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GLORIOUS PROSPECT.

LET us gather up a little of what has been said in the previous chapters. I have shown you that the Scriptures speak most plainly of the certainty of Christ's coming, but of its uncertainty in point of time, and therefore of the necessity of our being always in a state of readiness. I have endeavoured to describe the kind of life which a Christian ought to lead in view of that approaching day, and also of the special claims which an absent, but returning, Saviour has upon us. I have mentioned some of the signs which will usher in the Advent of our Lord. And, lastly, I have shown what the word of God reveals to us as to

the manner and the object of His coming.

Let us now, in this closing chapter, dwell for a few minutes on that precious and glorious declaration of our Lord, that *where He is there shall His servants be*. This blessed truth is repeated by the Apostle, who declares that 'we shall be ever with the Lord.'

From the very moment that He appears His people will be with Him. And we cannot suppose that, when once admitted into His presence, they can ever be parted from Him again. No, they shall be eternally with Him, the sharers of His glory and His joy.

Many things concerning our future condition are still concealed from us. *Where* our home is to be we know not. Whether our eternal life will be spent here on this earth restored and renewed, or whether some other spot will be chosen for our heavenly abode, we know not. What the exact nature

of our bliss will be, no tongue can tell, and no mind conceive. But this we know *beyond a doubt*, that where He is, *there* will be our heaven.

We know too that our condition then will be one of *unmixed happiness*. In His presence 'there must be fulness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore.' There will be no sorrows there to mar our bliss, no difficulties to perplex us, no jarring between brother and brother, no differences of opinion, which so separate us here; but all will be unity and love; every voice will strike the same note, and every mind will be in unison with the mind of God.

It will be a state of *perfect holiness*; for sin cannot enter there, and 'we shall be like Him.' It will be a condition of *complete knowledge*; for 'we shall know even as we are known.' It will be *rest*, but not a rest of idleness; for 'His servants shall serve Him.'

Nothing that can give us happiness will be withheld from us. Our blessings, which

we enjoyed on earth, will have their counterpart in heaven, though in a far higher degree. The enjoyments of relationship and friendship will no doubt be restored and intensified. Our capacity for loving God, and for loving each other, will be enlarged. It is a pleasant thought that we shall see *there* those whom we had loved here. But far more blessed is the feeling that we shall see and hold intercourse with that dear Friend, towards whom the best and holiest affections of our heart used to go forth, even when we were far away from Him, pilgrims and strangers upon earth.

Heaven must at least be to a certain extent an unknown land to us. But when sometimes we are puzzled to think what it will be, let us content ourselves with this one thought—I shall be *with my Lord*. There is enough in this to satisfy our deepest longings—enough to make us sigh for those ‘many mansions,’ where our Lord is gone to prepare a place for us, and for that time

when 'He shall come again, and receive us to Himself.'

But remember that whilst heaven is a prepared home for us, *we* must also be prepared for its enjoyment. Our heaven must begin here. We must grow in likeness to our Lord. We must know Him, and love Him. He must be to us as our familiar Friend. And then, when He calls us hence, it will merely be to come up higher, and to enjoy His uninterrupted presence in a purer world.

And now, my dear Reader, I must close my book, and take my leave of you. Some may feel that the view which I have taken of the Second Advent is somewhat meagre, and that I have omitted many particulars on which writers on this subject usually delight to dwell. My wish has been to divest the subject of all that is merely probable, and to dwell only on what is actual, real, and certain.

My earnest prayer is that you may realise more than ever your close union with the Lord, always 'abiding in Him,' that 'when He shall appear, you may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at his coming.'

LONDON:
JOHN STRANGEWAYS, PRINTER
Castle St., Leicester Sq.



