

THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE

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An exposition of Scripture relating to the Second Advent

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Down the minster aisles of splendour, from betwixt the cherubim, Through the wondering throng, with motion strong and fleet, Sounds his victor tread approaching, with a music far and dim, The music of the coming of his feet.

He is coming, O my spirit, with His everlasting peace, With his blessedness immortal and complete.

He is coming, O my spirit, and His coming brings release. I listen for the coming of His feet.

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Chapter 1 - THE GLORY OF THE CELESTIAL

A party of men stood gazing into the sky. Overhead, the Syrian sun blazed in a vault of blue. In the distance a patch of cloud drifted lazily away, and that solitary group on the eastern slopes of Olivet stood looking still, faces radiant with sudden understanding. Their Master and daily companion had just ascended into Heaven before their very eyes, and still in each mind echoed the words spoken by strange visitors only a few minutes before, "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11).

From earliest times men and nations have dreamed of and looked for the "Coming One". Nearly every race under heaven has amongst its most cherished traditions the story of One who came from above to do good, and departed with a promise that upon his return the utmost desire of every man would be fulfilled and the woes of humanity should be no more. There has always been a deep longing in men's hearts for that Deliverer who shall come to save them from themselves. Behind the traditions there is a common origin, the story of how to man, fallen from perfection, a willful violator of Divine Law, and consequently condemned to reap the penalty of that violation - death - came a ray of hope in the promise of God that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). God is one day to undo the effects of that evil which man had brought upon himself, and as men multiplied and spread abroad over the face of the earth that promise was carried with them and evolved into a thousand fantastic mythologies all having the same basis of fact. One day "He that shall come" shall descend from the heavens to the salvation of man.

Small wonder then that it is recorded of the day of Jesus Christ's first Advent that "all people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or

not. " (Luke 3:15). Little cause for surprise that they asked him "Art thou that prophet? " (John 1:21; Deut. 18:13; Acts 3:22). Greater cause for wonder perhaps that being thus in expectation they failed to realize in the person of Jesus Christ the Deliverer for whom they looked. Blinded by an incorrect conception of the manner as well as the object of his appearing, they knew not the time of their visitation and lost an opportunity which can never be regained.

Now in our own day history is repeated. For nearly two thousand years disciples of Christ have followed in the footsteps of those first eleven men, looking for and expecting the Lord from Heaven. Nevertheless, until the general enlightenment of these past two centuries there has never been that marked advance in the understanding of this age-old hope, which enabled disciples to view in clear and accurate perspective the teaching of Christ and the apostles regarding his promised return. The materialism of orthodox theology through the centuries has reflected itself in current expectation regarding the Second Advent, and not until the Bible began to be widely studied and discussed a hundred and fifty years ago did the doctrine of his coming begin to take great strides forward out of the gross literalism with which its ablest exponents had invested it.

Now we live in a time when the literal fires of Hell, the golden floors and pearly gates of Heaven, the falling mountains and the strident trumpets of the Day of Judgment, are all recognized to be material symbols of spiritual truths. In many quarters among Christian people the call of the Church, and God's provision for the world which is outside the Church, are beginning to be seen as two phases of a beneficent Plan intended to bring "whosoever will" into full harmony with righteousness. Election and Free Grace are no longer considered irreconcilable doctrines involving the spilling of much theological ink. Death as the logical and inevitable wages of sin, rather than a method of revenge adopted by an offended Deity, is seen to be the law of God's creation; and everlasting life, on either spiritual or human plane of being, to be the glorious prospect held out to those who willingly align themselves with the principles of righteousness.

Therefore it should be considered a reasonable proposition that, recognizing this marked advance in the spiritual perception of Scriptural teaching, the sublime theme upon which preachers and students alike have dwelt for centuries should share in such progressive development. The material trappings surrounding every man's conception of that day when the "Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout" can be very reasonably expected to wax old and vanish away when progress in Christian thought renders it possible for a clearer and more lucid vision to be received and understood by the "Watchers".

It is then with a sober recognition of the value of past expositions and an intelligent expectation of progressive revelation in the understanding of this theme that the subject is approached. To reject the present plane of belief and to go back to the ideas held two centuries ago is out of the question. To imagine that there is nothing further to be known regarding the subject is nonsense. Increasing knowledge of the physical universe and a deeper understanding of the nature of that spiritual world which is beyond the reach of human sense, will prepare the mind for a more definite revelation than has been possible before. It is

possible to attain to a clearer knowledge of the transcendent truth implied by that most startling of all the statements of Jesus, "If I go away, I will come again".

"There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial, but the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another. "(1 Cor. 15:40).

An outstanding achievement in Christian thought during the last hundred years has been a deeper understanding of the spiritual world and the difference between human and spirit nature. In past ages, when men were groping their way to an understanding of the higher things of life, it was to be expected that even the deepest of thinkers could only visualize that spiritual world as a replica, although a less tangible replica, of this material one; its inhabitants as glorified human beings with more or less substantial bodies. Even today the same view is held by many. Since Scriptural teaching concerning the Second Advent is so closely knit with a true appreciation of the nature of that spiritual realm which has as its center the throne of God himself, it becomes necessary to have a clear understanding of the distinction between human and spiritual beings.

In the text quoted above, and throughout a large part of the Fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul draws a clear distinction between the natural and the spiritual (using the term "natural" in its primary sense of material, tangible to the five senses) and makes it plain that the spiritual nature is of a different order not discernible by those five senses. Although a real and continuing state of existence, its inhabitants acknowledging their Creator and fulfilling their ordained place in creation, it remains a world not perceived or visualized by the mind of man. The analogies of human experience are inadequate to describe the nature of the glory of that order which is so far above the human. Hence Paul, who was "conveyed away to the third heaven ", and heard "indescribable things, which it is not possible for a man to relate " (2 Cor. 12. 2-4 Diaglott), gaining just one glimpse of the glories of that world, found human words and earthly analogies insufficient to convey to other men the impression produced upon his own mind and memory. Likewise upon the occasion when Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus (1 Cor. 15:8) he received an impression of the resurrected Christ which could not be detected by the. natural eyesight, and under any other circumstances could not have been appreciated by Paul until he in his turn had been born into the spiritual world, in the First Resurrection. Hence his exclamation: "He was seen of me also, AS OF ONE BORN OUT OF DUE TIME. "

Now it is "this same Jesus," the resurrected Lord, in all the glory and with all the attributes of his spiritual nature, who returns to this earth at the time appointed. If the "Watchers" are not to be taken unawares at the time of his coming - and the Scripture assures us that they will not- It is essential that there be a clear appreciation of the principles which will govern the manner of his. return. The example of two thousand years ago, when He came to his own, and his own received him not, because they KNEW NOT the time of their visitation, stands ever before us -- a warning.

That our Lord Jesus Christ, before the days of his flesh, laid aside the glory which He had with the Father before this material order of things existed (John 17:5) and became MAN, `for the suffering of death" (Heb. 2:9) is an integral feature of the Christian faith. That upon

the third day in that tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden, He rose again "in the power of an endless life" to the full glory of spiritual being having no part nor lot further in the flesh which He had given for the life of the world is the basis upon which the doctrine of the "Ransom for All" (1 Tim. 2:5-6) is built. It is clear therefore, that our Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth, not as a man as in the days of his flesh but as a spiritual being. The question is then immediately suggested "What is a spirit?"

Paul's hypothetical disputant comes to mind at once "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come? " (1 Cor. 15:35). A glance back along the centuries will suffice to show how inextricably mixed are man's ideas concerning bodies of flesh and spiritual bodies. It is only to be expected that in the early days of mankind when the worship of "gods many and lords many", of sticks and stones and idols of gold and silver, was the accepted thing, man's conception of a spiritual being was almost completely anthropomorphic (pictured in the form of human beings and material things). The dead were buried with food and drink and implements beside them, for their use in the other world. The Sumerians in the days of Abraham sent numbers of slaves to their doom upon the death of the reigning monarch to serve him in the after life. The Egyptians embalmed their dead so that the body was available for use again on the day of resurrection. Even Moses, conversing with God upon the mount, pleaded that he might for one moment gaze upon the face of the Almighty.

This primitive inability to visualize the world of the spirit without such material appendages finds its counterpart today in the belief that the "rapture of the saints" will comprise a glorifying of the human body with the eternal retention of what is in all its essentials the present physical frame. Similarly the returning Lord is looked for in purely material guise, the body laid in the tomb outside Jerusalem enduring to all eternity as the "Lord from heaven", Who is now and for all time the Head over all things both in heaven and on earth.

Our Lord's own words to Nicodemus convey a depth of meaning to the observant which, rightly received, banish for ever all such crudities of thought. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. " (John 3:8).

Those who are accounted worthy to attain "that world, and that resurrection from the dead" are like the wind, which is invisible, powerful, but comprehended only by the effects of its presence, and this understanding receives startling confirmation when the lesson of our Lord's conversations with his disciples after his resurrection is considered.

His recorded "appearances" number about eleven, but in only one instance, that of the manifestation to Thomas, did He appear in his pre-Crucifixion likeness. Mary, at the tomb, saw a gardener. The disciples, on the way to Emmaus, saw a stranger. On the shore of the sea of Galilee they failed to recognize the unknown friend until the miraculous draught of fishes was taken. This One who appeared and disappeared at will, assumed various forms and features, found locked and bolted doors no hindrance to his passing, was very evidently not the MAN Christ Jesus they had known.

What then is more reasonable to expect than that He who, in the days of his flesh and by Divine power, manipulated the constituents of matter to produce wine where formerly there had been water, or by its exercise so controlled the forces of Nature that the storm on the lake ceased at his Word, should not, after being "clothed upon" with his spiritual body, call on the same power to create upon each occasion a form of human lineaments which should be the medium of his communication with those whose senses could only be receptive to material things. The one satisfactory explanation, not only of Christ's appearances after his resurrection, but of all the recorded appearances of celestial visitants throughout Old Testament history, is that the gap between spiritual communication and human reception was bridged by this quasimaterial expedient; a necessity because it is not possible for spiritual beings to be perceived or comprehended by human senses.

After Pentecost there came a change. No longer do messengers from above appear to men in human garb as the three men sought Abraham. The coming of the Holy Spirit, which at Pentecost introduced a new influence bearing the Divine Revelation to men upon earth, rendered the older methods of communication unnecessary and superfluous.

To those who have come "into Christ", by complete self-surrender and consecration to him, the power of the Holy Spirit conveys an understanding of spiritual truth and through that an appreciation of the spiritual world which can be given in no other way. No longer can such appearances convey real assurance in a day when modern science and magic is well able to reproduce similar phenomena. The deeper knowledge that comes from constant spiritual communion with God by prayer and Divine guidance overshadows by far those material aids to faith which were given to the disciples in the time of their need. The physical appearing of Christ as a human being -- as even the noblest and most imposing of human beings--would surely constitute a very poor anti-climax to the stirring events which in all the world around us have been heralds of his coming.

Logically, then, the whole conception of Christ's Second Advent is changed. The sign of his presence is no longer a visible appearance in the skies with attendant angels and the sound of trumpets. The watchfulness inculcated upon those disciples who would be witnesses of his return is not a physical watchfulness which keeps the eye upon the clouds and the ear strained to catch the voice heard from Heaven. The whole technique of "watching" is revolutionized. Not now does the instructed Christian expect to see his Lord by physical sight, but in a deeper and truer manner he will realize the fact of his presence by a spiritual insight and understanding of the Scriptural evidences relating to the time and circumstances of his coming. He will "see" him through the obvious fulfillment of the Scriptures in relation to contemporary events and the motion of forces which result in the destruction of this present order of things and the establishment of God's Kingdom in its place.

This realization implies a diligent study of Bible prophecy in the light of current events. It implies a clear understanding of the purpose as well as the nature of his coming before any attempt to recognize the time can be made. It implies a deep spiritual watchfulness if the full meaning of our Master's own words "Watch, for ye know neither the day nor the hour" is to be appreciated. But once there is a firm grasp of this essential truth that Christ at his Second Advent must of necessity be invisible and uncomprehended by mortal eyes, the way is paved

for full acceptance of the New Testament teaching that Christ's Advent is to cover that whole period of time which in the Divine Plan has been set apart for the recovery of mankind from sin and death. He comes, not to pass sentence upon a multitude of trembling sinners and carry a few elect ones away to heavenly glory, but to wind up the very unsatisfactory state of affairs now existing in what Paul calls "this present evil world"; to establish upon its ruins a new and better order of things "wherein dwelleth righteousness" and so to deal with all mankind, the risen dead as well as the contemporary living, by wise and merciful administration, that all men may come to know God as they have never known him before.

It is to this unostentatious aspect of Christ's return that the angels made reference when they said "This same Jesus, which is taken on from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11).

Away from the haunts of men, invisible to the busy life of the city, upon the eastern slopes of Bethany it was that the Son of Man took his leave of earth. None perceived his going, save the faithful few who watched. Similarly none perceive his return save the few Christian disciples whose spiritual senses are continually exercised to discern the evidence of his unseen presence. He went away a glorious spiritual being, for his humanity had been given at Calvary for the life of the world. The physical form which the disciples' eyes followed until a cloud received it out of their sight was but a materialized body which manifested "the Lord-that Spirit" to men whose natural eyes were unable to perceive the presence of a heavenly being. When He appeared in the presence of God for us his manhood was left behind for ever -- and He was in very truth glorified with the Father with that glory which He had with him before the world was. (John 17:5). Likewise He who returns is the Lord from Heaven, the spiritual being, a man no longer.

It was afterwards that the masses knew of his resurrection and ascension-proclaimed in the streets and squares of the city by men upon whom rested the power of the Holy Spirit. So will it be again. It is after the first consciousness of his Second Presence has dawned upon those who are watching, that the realization of this stupendous event and all that it implies will come to mankind at large.

That material form ascended before the disciples' eyes visibly for a thousand or so feet at most, and it was when it disappeared into the cloud and the disciples could see no more, that Jesus Christ, who for thirty-three years had dwelt among men in the flesh, partaking in every respect of the nature of this material world, passed out of this realm of time and space into that eternity which knows not either, 'from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.'

Chapter 2 - DAWN

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. " (Matt. 24:27).

Few texts have been more discussed than this when the Second Advent is being considered, and there are few which are more generally misunderstood. A brilliant comparison drawn by our Lord has been in large measure miscomprehended by reason of an all too common failing, that of taking an isolated text of Scripture and endeavoring to interpret it without any reference to its immediate context. As soon as the connection of these words with those uttered by Jesus in the same breath is appreciated the force and meaning of this passage becomes luminous.

This twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew is historic. It records the detailed reply given by Jesus to his disciples in response to their earnest question as to when the Kingdom should come and by what sign they would discern the fact of his return to earth and the imminent end of the Age. To explain such all-important matters, closely interwoven as they were with a spiritual world of which those disciples knew nothing, was no easy task, and it became necessary for our Lord to select carefully chosen material analogies to make his meaning plain.

Passing over the long catalogue of intervening events, "wars and rumors of wars," "the abomination of desolation," "this gospel, preached for a witness" and so on, the twenty-sixth verse arrests the inquirer with a rather abrupt transition of thought.

"Wherefore, if they say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth. Behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. FOR AS the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, SO shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

Language could not be more definite. Two possible manifestations of his coming are rejected as inaccurate conceptions. The true manner of that event is pictured in the form of a third and totally dissimilar metaphor. The symbol of the desert is a false one. The symbol of the secret chambers is likewise defective. That of the lightning is a true illustration; and here is the sign for which the disciples asked.

A careful examination of this passage then should reveal the foundation upon which every Christian's expectation should be based. What spiritual truth lies behind the symbols of the desert, the secret chamber, and the lightning?

"Behold, he is in the desert." Those words must have fallen with a familiar ring upon the disciples' ears. Not so many years previously some of them had themselves been followers of John the Baptist, a prophet preaching in the desert: one of whom it was said "There went out to him (to the wilderness) Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region about Jordan." (Matt. 3:3-5). Not for John the busy life of the city, where his lone figure might easily be lost in the heedless crowds. Not for him a ministry in some quiet village, where a few immediate neighbors alone would listen to his impassioned words. John spent his life in a desert place

but amidst a blaze of publicity enhanced all the more by the fact that men streamed from all quarters to hear and see this singular and never-to-be-forgotten figure.

So it was with the seers of Israel. Elijah, who gripped the nation's imagination when he destroyed the priests of Baal; Moses, than whom there arose not a greater in Israel, (Deut. 34:10); others who, rising early and calling betimes, voices crying in the wilderness (Isa. 40:3) becoming influential figures in the national life, were prophets of the desert, known of all men, seen of all men, their very presence so obvious a fact that whether the people would hear or whether they would forbear, they could never blind themselves to the truth that a prophet stood before them.

"Behold, he is in the secret chambers. " A weak translation is responsible for hiding, at first, the allusion made here. The Greek word *tamieion* rendered "secret chambers" describes an inner room or storehouse which in every Eastern dwelling held the family treasures as well as stores and provisions. It became therefore a synonym for a private place, the place exclusive and secret to the family of the house, into which strangers could never intrude. The same word is used for "storehouse" and "closet" in the following scriptures:

Matt. 6:6 -- "When thou prayest, enter into thy CLOSET. "

Luke 12:3 -- "That which ye have spoken in CLOSETS shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops. "

Luke 12:24 -- "Consider the ravens which have neither STOREHOUSE nor barn".

Upon comparing this statement with the preceding one, our Lord's meaning is clear. In the understanding that his coming was not to be a publicly advertised and appreciated spectacle ("in the desert") the disciples were not to react to the opposite extreme and look for nothing more than a private revelation to a favored few in the secrecy of the family circle. For many centuries had Israel held to their claim of being the one nation selected and set apart for God's blessings, and not even the Samaritans were admitted into the fellowship of the chosen people. (John 4:9). They claimed Messiah was to be for the Jew, and the Jew alone, and all without were treated as outsiders. The tremendous struggle which took place in the minds of Apostles as well as other believers before they could accept the transcendent truth that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35) is well known to all readers of the New Testament.

The majority of Christians have progressed very little along this line. Even today there lingers in many quarters the idea that Jesus will appear for his own, but for nobody else. The conception of his coming, not only to take his Church to himself, but also- in due time after that great event-to reveal himself to all the world for their blessing and salvation, has not taken hold of many minds. The narrow-minded bigotry which has so well expressed itself in the old doggerel

"God bless me and my wife, My son John and his wife, Us four and no more" lingers on and still blinds the minds of some to a full conception of the immortal truth that is enshrined in

the succeeding verse. His coming is not in the open place of public view and universal knowledge, neither is it in the inner sanctuary of a chosen family, where no one outside will ever know anything about it. That event is to be discerned in a manner combining in a truly marvelous way as the "coming as a thief" to his own and yet in such a fashion that "every eye shall see him" when the time of his full manifestation shall have come; for

"As the 'Astrape' emerges from the east and shines to the west, so will be the presence of the Son of Man. " (Matt. 24:27 Diaglott).

The most soul-stirring conception of his Second Advent which Christ could possibly have given his disciples is that which is pictured in this metaphor of the radiance of dawn emerging from the east and flooding the world with light. Dawn in Israel is not the same thing as dawn in European countries and it is obvious that our Lord's allusion was based upon the reality with which his disciples were familiar. The ability to visualize an Eastern dawn is necessary if the full force of these words is to be appreciated.

The sun comes up suddenly, and a few minutes suffices to transform the velvety blackness of tropical night into the full brilliance of Syrian day. It is for this reason that very few inhabitants of the land actually witnessed the sun's rising, for their sleep was broken only by its dazzling beams as they encircle the earth. There is no long and gradual dawn as in more temperate countries. The first sign of approaching day is a greyness in the eastern sky, a greyness for which - in Jerusalem at least - both city watchmen and the priests in the Temple were duly waiting and watching - the watchmen, because it indicated the end of their period of service; and the priests, because as soon as light had flooded the land it was their duty to offer the morning sacrifice. Hence the constant Scriptural association of the coming of day with the "watchers," and the meaning of that cryptic message, "Watchman, what of the night? ... The morning cometh, BUT IT IS YET DARK" (Isa. 21:11-12, French version). Within a few minutes the greyness is streaked with shafts of pink, and, so rapidly as almost to bewilder the unaccustomed observer, a glorious effulgence of golden light spreads fanwise from the east and moves visibly across the sky, turning the clouds in its path to pink and white and bathing the entire land in a wonderful rosy glow. It was at this time that the watching priest, stationed in a pinnacle in the Temple, cried out in a loud voice that the light was come and had overspread the land, and his companions below immediately commenced the time-honored ritual of the morning sacrifice. Within a few more minutes the full blaze of day is pouring down upon a people quickly arising from sleep and betaking themselves to their accustomed tasks.

It is this emergence of light from the east, followed quickly by the sun itself, to which reference is made in Malachi 4:2 where the promise is that the "Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings" - the great fan of glory spreading over the sky as the sun rises being not inaptly likened to the pinions of some great celestial creature. And our Lord's own allusion to the "astrape" emerging from the east and sweeping the sky to the west is undoubtedly a reference to that same phenomenon which his disciples, early risers as they must always have been and accustomed to remaining awake all night, were thoroughly accustomed to witness.

In this connection it has to be realized that the Greek *astrape*, rendered "lightning" in this verse; and its derivatives, refers to any form of brilliant light or radiance. Thus we have:

Luke 24:4 -- "Two men stood by them in SHINING garments. "

Luke 11:36 -- "As when the BRIGHT SHINING of a candle doth give thee light. "

Luke 9:29 -- "His raiment was white and GLISTERING."

Matt. 28:3 -- "His countenance was like LIGHTNING."

Luke 19:18 -- "I beheld Satan as LIGHTNING fall. "

Acts 9:3 -- "There SHINED ROUNDABOUT him a light from heaven."

Acts 22:6 -- "There SHONE from heaven a great light round about me. "

Other occurrences in which the word is associated with thunder and can properly be applied to the vivid glare of lightning are found in Rev. 4:5, 8; 5:11,19; 16:18.

It is from the parallel account in Luke's gospel that the full implication of this as a time when the fact of Christ's presence is to dawn upon the minds of men is found.

"For AS the lightning, (*ASTRAPE*) that lighteneth (illuminates) out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; SO shall also the Son of Man be IN HIS DAY."(Luke 17:24).

Here then is a plain intimation that this metaphor predicates a period of time - the day of the Son of Man - likened to a natural day in so far as the analogy of dawn, meridian, and sunset, are concerned. It becomes easy to appreciate why the translators of the Revised Version, as well as such students as Robert Young, Joseph Bryant Rotherham, Dr. Wilson in the "Emphatic Diaglott," and more recently the translators of the "Concordant" version, all concur in rendering the Greek word "*parousia*," which is translated "coming" in the Authorized Version, by the English word "presence." It is the use of the word "coming" which has beclouded thought on the subject. Whilst men held the conception of a catastrophic arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ which would be the signal for a twenty-four hour day of judgment and the dissolution of all things terrestrial, there could be no other meaning than the traditional one applied to the word "*parousia*." When the real object of our Lord's return is seen, and the necessity for a comparatively lengthy period of time for the accomplishment of the things associated with his return is appreciated, the true meaning can be applied to the word with a full understanding of its significance. In this connection the following abbreviated extract from the appendix to J.B. Rotherham's translation of the New Testament will be read with interest.

"In this edition the word "*parousia*" is uniformly rendered "presence." The difficulty expressed in the notes to the second edition of this N.T. in the way of so yielding to this

weight of evidence as to render "Parousia" always by presence lay in the seeming incongruity of regarding "presence " as an event which would happen at a particular time and which would fall into rank as one of a series of events. The translator still feels the force of this objection, but is withdrawn from taking his stand upon it any longer by the reflection that after all, the difficulty may be imaginary. The parousia may, in fine, be both a PERIOD, more or less extended, during which certain things shall happen; and an EVENT coming on and passing away as one of a series of Divine interpositions. Christ is raised as a first fruit - that is one event. He returns and vouchsafes his "presence, " during which he raises his own - that is another event, however large and prolonged; and finally comes another cluster of events constituting the end. Hence, after all, "presence " may be the most widely and permanently satisfying translation of the looked for "parousia " of the Son of Man".

The commencement of his presence, then, the earliest time at which it can be said that the long-promised Second Advent has become an accomplished fact, is to be discerned by the dawning of a spiritual illumination in the minds of the "Watchers" -- the early-risers -- an appreciation, not only of the object and manner of the Second Advent, but also of the outward signs, in the affairs both of the Church and the world, which betoken that the "DAY of the Son of Man" has actually begun.

As if to stress this truth, Jesus ended this remarkable statement with a fourth metaphor, equally arresting in its strangeness. "For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. "(Matt. 24:28).

Travelers in Israel have often remarked on the keenness of sight which characterizes the several species of eagle and vulture which formerly abounded, and are still to be found, in the country. Vivid descriptions have been written of occasions when a beast of burden has fallen by the wayside, and although a second previously the sky has been clear in every direction, the animal has hardly become still when far in the heavens appears a black speck - then another, and another - birds of prey traveling with incredible speed to the victim their marvelous power of vision has revealed to them. Thus in drawing attention to that predominant characteristic of the eagle which stamped it out above all other denizens of the air, our Lord inculcated a lesson which must be indelibly impressed upon the mind if Christ's presence in its early stages is to be discerned.

"WATCH therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. "(Matt. 24:42).

As the eagles can see, as it were by supernatural sight, their prey afar off and come, first in ones and twos, and then in greater numbers to the centre of attraction, so must the disciples of Christ, watching for his coming, expect to see the evidences with a sight which is superior to the natural, and come quickly in concert with others who also have seen. Hence the constant exhortation to watchfulness - not a continual gazing into the physical heavens and an anxious scanning of every cloud that drifts across the sky, lest it be the one which shall cleave asunder to reveal the returning Lord with his attendant angels. Nothing so material as that. The call is to spiritual watchfulness, that a clear understanding of the manner of Christ's manifestation may pave the way to a full and complete acceptance of the reality of his presence when that fact is revealed.

That many are to be oblivious to his presence is clearly indicated in the likening of the day of the Son of Man to the day of Noah and the day of Lot. In each case the similarity lay in the ignorance of mankind at large to the fact that there stands one among them whom they know not.

"For, just as the days of Noah, SO will be the presence of the Son of Man; For as they were in those days that were before the food, feeding and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the Ark; and they observed not, until the food came and took away all together, so will be the presence of the Son of Man. " (Matt. 24:37-39 - Rotherham).

With each of these comparisons there is repeated the exhortation to WATCH. The allusion is taken from the function of watchmen upon the city walls, alert to report every new and unusual occurrence before the city dwellers could possibly have become aware of such. The watchmen first saw the dawn, they hailed the approach of deliverers when the city was besieged, they became in every respect the symbol of the nation's watching and waiting on the things of God and communion with Heaven. Hence we have in the glowing words of Isaiah:

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night. " (Isaiah 62:6). "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him (the watchman) that sayeth unto Zion `Thy God reigneth.'" (Isaiah 52:7).

"Thy watchmen ... shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion. "(Isaiah 52:8 Margolis).

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is manifested, then, as the dawn; a realization of the fact of his presence discerned at first only by those who are spiritually minded and able to appreciate fully the outward evidences which witness to this truth. That appreciation grows stronger until a time comes when, as in a moment, the realization of his presence penetrates to a sleeping world and awakens all men to "look upon him whom they have pierced," and to "mourn for him" (Zech. 12:10) as the sunlight of his presence floods the world. But that belongs to the time of meridian day, and not to early dawn.

As the light thus sweeps over the world and men realize and accept the fact that a new power has taken control of earth's affairs, resplendent in the heavens will be seen that "Sun of righteousness" which brings life and healing to the nations. "For he must reign, until he hath put all enemies under his feet." "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Cor. 15:25-26). It is then that Christ the King presents the restored and perfected human race, in possession of a reconstructed and beautified earth, to the Eternal Father, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:28).

The Messianic reign runs its allotted course and comes to its close like the sun, which, setting in a blaze of glory over the western sea is so startlingly reminiscent of those prophetic words of old "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. " (Hab. 2:14.) The key to this whole sublime picture lies in the word

"presence". The coming of the Lord, no longer a momentary nor even a twenty-four hour event, but a period during which all the varied phases of his Second Advent find their place and reach their consummation, will conclude with a very real fulfillment of the words spoken to Zechariah "At evening time it shall be light. " (Zech. 14:7).

The metaphor is a true one. The radiance which emerges from the east is to shine even unto the west before it has fully completed its picture of the day of Christ. And in that glorious sunset of the end of Christ's parousia restored humanity will enter upon an eternity of "ages of glory" spent in exploring to the farthest limit the wonderful potentialities of sinless manhood.

Chapter 3 - VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL

"The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).

The New Testament speaks of three distinct aspects of the Second Coming. Each aspect presents a section of the work which our Lord is to accomplish at his Advent and each employs a different set of symbols to describe the characteristics of that aspect of the work. Each phase is worked out on this earth as the stage, not necessarily simultaneously although to some extent they do overlap. Taken together as a whole, they constitute the events of the Day of his Presence, the period which He himself described as "the days of the Son of Man".

A brief survey of the position shows that Christ returns first to reveal himself to his own, who have been intelligently watching and waiting for his Advent, to resurrect the "dead in Christ" of past ages who have been laid aside waiting for this moment, and to "change" the living ones who experience the time of the Advent from earthly to heavenly conditions. This is associated with what, in the parable of the Wheat and Tares, and in the vision of Rev. 14, is called the "Harvest of the Age" in which the prime purpose of the period between the First and Second Advents, the development and gathering to heavenly conditions of the Christian Church, is accomplished.

The second is that which pictures the Lord as coming to bring man's admittedly unsatisfactory domination of earthly affairs to an end and establish his own righteous and beneficent administration, the long-promised Millennial kingdom of peace and prosperity, in its place. This, described in somewhat somber symbols such as the downfall of "great Babylon" and the end of the "kingdoms of the earth", covers the period in which the returned Lord, unseen to mortal eyes, is so manipulating and overruling the schemes and actions of men that, at the last, when the world is in its extremity, men are ready to accept his oversight and abandon all further attempts to govern a world whose problems have grown too great for them to solve.

The third aspect is of brighter hue and speaks of the Lord's open manifestation to all mankind when all opposition to his Advent has ceased and men are ready to listen to the "voice that speaketh from Heaven". This is a later stage of the Advent, and becomes true only when the gathering of the Church is an accomplished fact and the evident failure of men to control the disruptive forces which are increasingly threatening ordered society on the earth has caused them to cry out, in the words of Isaiah, "this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation".

The first subject to examine, therefore, is that which most closely concerns the Church of Christ. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonian Christians, left on record for all time a vivid description of the manner in which our Lord at his return would be manifested to "them that look for him" (Heb. 9:28).

"The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout. " This clearly speaks of the actual point of time at which our Lord's Presence becomes an accomplished fact. It is to be signaled

by a "shout." The Greek word is an unusual one, "Keleusma," used nowhere else in the New Testament and evidently deliberately selected by Paul to convey a meaning which could not be conveyed in any other way. In New Testament days sea-going vessels (galleys) were propelled by rowers, sometimes as many as three or four hundred men being thus employed in a single ship; and to ensure that these men pulled in unison, an overseer known as the "Keleustes" stood in a commanding position on the ship and gave at regular intervals, in unison with the rowing, a cry which was called the "keleusma." This call urged the men to sustained effort, directed their work, and so became a shout of combined authority, direction and encouragement. This is what is in the mind of St. Paul. He describes the descent of Christ to direct and supervise a work, to take authority over that work, and to encourage to great effort. To use a more modern illustration, He takes up his position as the captain on the bridge, and proceeds to direct the first great work of his Presence.

What that work involves may be discerned from an examination of related Scripture. Rev. 14:14-16 speaks of one like unto the Son of Man coming to earth upon a white cloud, crowned with a golden crown and wielding a sharp sickle. A cry is made that the harvest of the earth is ripe and ready to be reaped. Scriptural analogy points unerringly to the parable of the wheat field in Matt. 13:24-30. The inspired explanation of that parable given by Jesus in Matt. 13:37-43 of the same chapter states that the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the Kingdom, and the tares are the children of the Evil One. Both are to grow together until the harvest. When the harvest is come, the Chief Reaper will say to his servants "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn ". There is to be no attempt at separation until the Lord of the harvest is present, with his sickle, and gives the word. The harvest is definitely stated in the same parable to be the "end of the Age"-the same period for which the disciples in Matthew Twenty-four desired to know the signs.

The harvest, then, takes its place as one of the events comprising the end of the Age, and requiring a definite span of time for its accomplishment. It is clear also that the harvest commences with the presence of the Chief Reaper, He, as it were, leading by cutting the first ripe wheat. Much in this reminds one of the solitary phrase in I Thessalonians, "And the dead in Christ shall rise first. " The in-gathering of the children of the Kingdom pictured by ripened wheat will surely commence with those who have already "rested from their labors."

This "keleusma" will obviously not be a literal shout heard by the literal ears. It is spiritually discerned, and its evidence will be the manifest fact that a work is proceeding in the Christian world which corresponds to the parable of the harvest of wheat and tares, supported by such evidence of the declining power of the "kingdoms of this world" as to justify the assumption that the end of the Age is at hand. It will be of such a nature as to induce great encouragement to the "Watchers" and an incentive to great activity on behalf of the "gospel of the Kingdom." (Matt. 24:14). It must definitely imply direction and oversight of a work in Christendom which has not been done previously, and it must be closely associated with all that the Scriptures reveal concerning the condition of the Church of Christ upon earth - to whom alone the "shout" can be audible - in the closing years of their experience.

The "shout," therefore, should be understood as indicating that the time of our Lord's return is marked by a recognition that the Harvest of the Age is commencing and that the final separation between wheat and tares is in progress. As a positive "sign" to the Watchers who are living during that period this "shout" is one of conviction as well as encouragement, and constitutes one very definite outward evidence of the "parousia".

The second allusion describing this eventful time is Paul's reference to "the voice of the archangel."

Judaistic tradition knew seven archangels: Uriel, Raphael, Raquel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel. They were considered to be the special commissioners of God to watch over his creation and to each was allotted a specific duty. The archangel to whom was entrusted the protection and defense of the people of Israel was Michael, and here the Scripture becomes luminous when the various references to Michael, the only archangel mentioned in the Bible as such, are remembered. In the book of Daniel Michael is the spiritual prince of Israel. In Revelation he is shown in symbol as leading the forces of Heaven, while Jude mentions an occasion upon which he contended with the devil over the body of Moses. To Paul's readers, then, the expression in Thessalonians could bear one meaning only - the voice of the archangel indicated that the prince of Israel, the protector of God's people, the One who should "stand up " at the Time of the End (Dan. 12:1) was in the act of arriving. The traditionary conception of Michael the archangel as the prince of Israel finds its reality in Christ, the great protector who comes to save his own.

The voice of the archangel is thus not a literal voice sounding upon the air and perceived by the natural ears; it follows that, like the "shout," the discernment of this voice is a spiritual matter. Those who by an understanding of the "signs of the times" perceive that the call has gone forth to engage in the reaping work of this Gospel Age harvest are the ones who hear the voice of the archangel.

The third signal given by Paul in his metaphor is the "trump of God". This idea of a mighty trumpet heralding the wonderful events which close this Age and usher in the future day of blessing is very prominent in the New Testament. To a people such as the Jews, familiarized in their ancient history with the use of the trumpet to announce a going forth to war; to herald the feast days; and the year of Jubilee, when the land had rest and all men were restored to their inheritance, this must have been a very apt symbol. The last trumpet, the one which announces and declares Christ the coming King, which informs all men of the greater Jubilee, "Times of Restitution spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began " (Acts 3:21), and sounds the signal for the Battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14) is indeed a momentous one. Like the other symbols, it is not a literal trumpet blast as Israel heard at Sinai (Heb. 12:19) but its spiritual counterpart; a clear and definite proclamation making known throughout the world that the Time of the End has come, that the Lord has descended from Heaven to set up his Kingdom, and that the good tidings for all people are about to be declared in very truth. The fulfillment of this symbol must certainly be looked for in such a world-wide proclamation, commencing with the realization and declaration that the Harvest of the Age has commenced and continuing with increasing enlightenment and diligence in testifying to the Kingdom on the part of those who have

themselves heard this trumpet. The revelation of Truth concerning Christ's mission and the Divine Plan, once commenced in this fashion, will continue and extend until in the full glory of the Millennial Kingdom, it shall become true that "all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest of them." (Jer. 31:34). Hence the trump of God commences to sound at the time of the Lord's descent from Heaven, and continues so to sound until all men have heard its message. During the whole period of the parousia its notes will penetrate to the minds of men with "good tidings of good". (Isa. 52:7-8).

Now it should be noted that with the sounding of this trumpet certain events are associated. Paul in 1 Cor. 15:52 declares that "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". Again in I Thess. 4:16-17 he says "the Lord shall descend from heaven with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air". Taken together, these Scriptures indicate that while the "last trump" is sounding, there will be a resurrection of the dead in Christ and a change from earthly to spiritual conditions for those who, being Christ's, are still "alive and remain" at the time of his Presence.

The close association of these words with the act of descending from Heaven might well justify the view that the dead in Christ, or, as they are sometimes termed, the "sleeping saints," are resurrected as the first work carried out by our returned Lord. This resurrection is not to human form and environment, but to spiritual nature and into the spiritual world, a clothing upon with "our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:2). That those thus raised are brought into personal association with the Lord Christ is evident; it is thus that Paul's own wish 'for the returning and being with Christ' (Phil. 1:23 Diaglott) becomes reality. There is no assumption that those thus raised commence their reign with Christ until He himself has established his Kingdom and begun to reign, it being already admitted that Christ returns to earth for the purpose of "taking his great power" (Rev. 11:17) that He may "in due time" commence his reign. It is sufficient, therefore, at the moment to appreciate that the "risen saints" will from the time of their resurrection "be with Christ".

Were the Second Advent but the work of a moment, this primary raising of the sleeping ones would involve an immediate and simultaneous "change" of all the remaining members of Christ's church on earth, and the instant cessation of his work among the saints of this Age. This is the belief held by many Christians, especially by those accepting the twenty-four' hour catastrophic view of the ending of this world, and within these limits is perfectly logical. It fails, however, to take into proper account the Gospel Age harvest and the three-fold character of the Second Advent previously referred to. Once it is appreciated that the "Presence" occupies a certain period of time during which various events occur relative to the winding up of earth's affairs and the introduction of the new Kingdom, it is easier to understand that a possibility exists for some of the "saints" to continue living during this period of time whilst the events of the presence of Christ are proceeding. This gives a wider and more significant meaning to Paul's words "We which are alive and remain". The dead in Christ are to rise first. Then we which are alive and remain are to be changed. There is no necessity for that change to be simultaneous-provided that all who become Christ's do in fact

experience their change before the day comes when, resplendent in the heavenly glory "the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father " (Matt. 13:43).

These statements in Thessalonians, then, should be interpreted as symbols expressive of that spiritual discernment upon the part of Christ's disciples which enables them at the time of his Advent to realize the fact. He comes to encourage, to direct his work, to proclaim his coming Kingdom, and to gather into their spiritual home all who have become members of his Body - the "Bride of Christ". By the close of this "Harvest" period the "General Assembly and Church of the First-born " (Heb. 12:23) will have become a reality, and with the cessation of overt resistance to the incoming era of peace and justice the stage will be set for that stupendous scene when "then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, . . . and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory " (Matt. 24:30).

Chapter 4 - IN FLAMING FIRE

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God " (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

One of the aspects of the Second Advent is the superseding of what the Scriptures call "the kingdoms of this world", with all their imperfections, by the benevolent rulership of Christ, reigning in the heavens. This, of course, involves the elimination of every form of injustice, oppression, violence and so on, which is what every ordered system of government now existing attempts to achieve, but falls consistently on account of human frailty. In the day of Christ's reign these things will be done away, and all men will be well satisfied with their passing. But because this change for the better does involve the passing away of many forms of evil the Scriptures do portray the Lord as coming in this sphere of his Advent for the purpose of judgment and retribution, as a destroyer rather than a preserver.

The whole setting of what are called the "catastrophic" Scriptures implies an outwardly spectacular work, an epoch of destruction of evil things and powers, preparatory to the setting up of that which is to be, in the words of Zephaniah, the "desire of all nations", - the earthly kingdom of God. For this reason the descriptions of this phase of the Advent are cast in the form of fiery destruction, severe judgment, the judgment of God upon evil things which, because they are evil, must now pass away and be no more. The "flaming fire" is a metaphor to denote the utter consumption and extinction of all that is opposed to the righteousness of God and would be out of place in the new order of peace and safety now about to dawn on the world. This passage in 2 Thessalonians, lurid as it appears to be, is in reality a poetic expression of the Millennial work of our Lord going on throughout that Age, directed to the elimination of all sin and the concomitants of sin and such, if any, as prove obdurate in their refusal to turn from their evil ways, so that at the end Divine creation is clean and "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord". The "flaming fire" will have done its work.

There are many Scriptures which speak prophetically of this same time when the greed and sin and selfishness of mankind has brought the world into its Armageddon, a time of trouble from which there can be no escape except by the coming of the Messianic Age. That this time of trouble is the natural result of man's own course and conduct since creation does not make any difference to the fact that a mightier hand than that of man is guiding and overruling these events for man's ultimate good.

It should be clear then that the "Michael, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people " of Dan. 12, who "stands up" and gives the signal for the great time of trouble; the "Son of Man " of Dan. 7 who comes to the Great Assize of the Most High and the fires of judgment, to receive royal power over the resurrected and restored human race; the mighty angel of Rev. 18 who is revealed in fiery glory from heaven to announce the downfall of "great Babylon", antitype of the literal Babylon of twenty-five centuries ago, with the consequent ruin of the military and commercial magnates of the earth resulting from the collapse of world order; the coming of the Lord to make an end of the anti-Christian power of 2 Thess. 2 by "the spirit of his mouth and the bright shining of his presence "; the appearance from Heaven of the "Rider on a White Horse " leading the armies of Heaven to engage in

combat with the armies of earth, are all different symbolic representations of the same event described in Thessalonians as the appearing of the Lord in flaming fire to take vengeance on "them that know not God". It is to be feared that the translators of the English Authorized Version, believing, as did all men in the seventeenth century, in the twenty-four hour Day of Judgment with the hopeless condemnation of all sinners without opportunity for repentance, and the burning up of the earth as a place no longer fit to endure, led them, unwittingly perhaps, to present the situation in perhaps more drastic fashion than the avowed mission of Jesus "to seek and save them which are lost" would really warrant. If these passages, are interpreted as what they really are, flights of apocalyptic poetry depicting the expected events of the "Last Days" in terms of signal catastrophic happenings in past history, a much more informative picture can be drawn.

That picture will be something like this. The arrival of the Lord from Heaven is coincident with a time in which the human race is facing a complete breakdown of its governmental systems, its economic and social order, and the preservation of its environment. Jesus likened it to a time of worldwide war, social unrest, famine, pestilence, all on a hitherto unprecedented scale. The position will be as described by him in the words "upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things coming on the earth" (Luke 21:25-26), after which He declared "and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory". This latter remark associates the vision of Daniel 7, in which the Son of Man is pictured as coming in the clouds to supersede all human forms of government by his own empire of righteousness and peace, with the very condition of things which admittedly is characteristic of the world today. The consuming of the "Man of Sin" by the spirit of the Lord's mouth (2 Thess. 2:8) will already be in progress, and the period immediately following his arrival will witness its progressive consumption and eventual destruction by the "bright shining of his presence". There will already have been a widespread proclamation and understanding of the "truth now due" on those features of the Divine Plan which had previously been hidden by the theology of the Dark Ages, and this understanding will have helped in the consuming of the Antichrist, by the "spirit of his mouth", and anticipate the expression in Rev. 18:1-8 where, says John, an angel "came down from heaven, and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning, and famine,- and she shall be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her". The picture is based on the victory over the Babylonians and the capture and fall of the city of Babylon by the Persians in the 5th century B.C., when Babylon, the unquestioned military and commercial master of Biblical lands was dispossessed and conquered by the rising power of Persia. In harmony with this historical parallel the 18th chapter of Revelation goes on to picture in detail how, first, the kings of the earth-leaders in the olden days of their military forces - lament and bewail the catastrophic end to their sovereignty; next, the merchants of the earth "weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more "; 'for in one hour so great riches is come to naught". In other words, the world's economic and financial system breaks down irretrievably under the impact of the world situation which they themselves have created. Finally, "every shipmaster and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stand afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, what city is like unto this great city. Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had

ships in the sea by reason of her costliness, for in one hour (in a moment, abruptly) is she made desolate ". No better picture of the utter failure of a world-wide economic system could be drawn.

The completion of this work of the supersession of the rule of man by the rule of God, to the satisfaction of all right-thinking men, forms the subject of the vision of Rev. 19, in which our Lord, in the guise of a military leader riding a white horse, his forces behind him, engages in combat with the kings of all the earth and their armies. The ensuing victory of the forces of Heaven introduces the Millennium and "the new heaven and the new earth " of chapters 20 and 21, in which "the dwelling of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, for the former things are passed away ".

Be it noted that in all these passages, fire is the symbol used to denote the utter destruction to which every evil or unrighteous or unjust practice opposed to the principles of the Divine kingdom are devoted. There is no suggestion anywhere that human beings are thus destroyed; the reference is consistently to the powers, the institutions, the systems of human affairs which are alien to the incoming Kingdom of Righteousness. All must go, before that "judgment in righteousness" (Acts 17:31) which God has ordained, can begin.

Simultaneously with the "Harvest", then, this work of Divine judgment proceeds. In Rev. 14 it is shown as a "Harvest" of the "Vine of the earth", a vintage of the unrighteous ways of man, come to its fruitage in parallel with the wheat harvest which pictures the fruits of righteousness. It has its commencement at the same time, the moment of our Lord's arrival, and both harvests must be completed before the final scenes of the "Days of the Son of Man" can be enacted in readiness for the universal manifestation to all men of the reality of the Advent, so eloquently described in the words "and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory ". This is the final event in the Advent; from then onwards "every eye shall see him" in the glory and power of his Millennial work.

Chapter 5 - HIS APPEARING

It is a basic principle that those who are Christ's are to be "changed" from earthly to heavenly life, to be with Christ their Lord, at a time prior to his revelation to the world, in order that they may be revealed "with him", to the world, at the time of his appearing to all men. The "two-stage" Advent, as it was called in the early part of the 19th century, is the framework within which this process takes place. The "shout", the "voice of the archangel", the "trump of God", are all phases and aspects of this earlier stage, when, as in the days of Noah, the simile used by our Lord in Matt. 24, the forces which are to bring the old world to an end are gathering force and impetus under the guiding hand of the Lord, already bringing the world to that point where all men will realize and accept the fact, and his "appearing" become reality. In the meantime, and whilst the kingdoms of this world, by reason of their own policies and actions, are declining to their fall, and the progressive despoliation of the planet itself is threatening the continued existence of human life, the Lord is engaged in another important feature of the Advent. That feature is the resurrection change of "the Church".

Once it is realized that the call and destiny of all committed Christians is that in the after life they shall initially become agents and missionaries for the conversion of all men, past and present, from whatever of separation and alienation of God may be their condition, and their full attainment of perfection of character and consequently reconciliation to and communion with God, the special position of the Church at the Advent becomes clear. It is not just a question of the righteous being taken away to heavenly felicity and all the rest cast off and consigned to everlasting woe. The last chapter of the Bible (Rev. 22:17) contains a stirring invitation "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come, And let him that heareth say Come, and whosoever is athirst, let him come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life, freely ". This is an invitation issued, not only by the returned Lord, but also by his Church, his "Bride", to all mankind to accept and profit by the opportunity of eternal life which it is the purpose of the then newly inaugurated Millennial Age to offer every man. And this demands that when at last "his appearing" is an accomplished fact his Church will be manifested with him from the heavenly world. Their earthly lives will have been finished and they will already have participated in the "First Resurrection" (Rev. 20:4, 6).

St. Paul makes this clear in 1 Cor. 15:51-52 where he distinguishes between the resurrection of those of the Church who have passed into death before the Advent and those who are still living at the time of its impingement upon the world. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". He further elaborates this in 1 Thess. 4. where he specifically states that the "living" ones shall not precede those who are "asleep". The dead in Christ shall rise first; then those living at the time of the Advent will follow them "and so shall we ever be with the Lord", so that all are with him in the heavenly state when at last He, with them, is manifested to all men and the fact of the Advent is universally recognized and accepted. The reference in Corinthians to the necessity of being "changed"-appearing instantaneously in a different form and different world, "in the twinkling of an eye", and in Thessalonians to being "caught up" - instantaneously translated to another place - is reflected from Paul's own insistence that flesh and blood cannot inherit the eternal world. The erstwhile terrestrial being becomes a celestial

being at this moment of resurrection, the earthly body being left behind and the individual awaking to conscious perception of existence in the celestial world in a celestial body adapted to that world. The cessation of conscious human life in this world is followed at once by conscious celestial life in the other.

So the stage is set for the final scenes in the drama of the transfer of rule from the kingdoms of this world to the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. This is where it begins to be true that the world of man in general will begin to "see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" as Daniel has it in his noteworthy 7th chapter dealing with this same time. It is significant that in that chapter the final judgment upon the evil powers of earth is already in progress when the Son of Man is thus seen advancing to take his power and commence his reign. This high-lights the fact that although the Church will have been resurrected to heavenly conditions there are still some final features of the termination of man's dominion to be worked out before the world-wide manifestation of the returned Lord can take place. And the most spectacular of those features will be the development and manifestation of the destined nation which is to be the first to hail and accept the returned Lord.

It is a cardinal principle of the Divine Plan that in addition to the Christian Church in heaven, poised as it were to enter upon its mission of world conversion, there is also to be a dedicated nation on earth, qualified and ready to work in conjunction with that Church to achieve this end. That nation, as verified by all Old Testament prophecy in addition to New Testament doctrine, is Israel. Not the Israel of the present day, taking its place as one of the kingdoms of this world, partaking of the policies and methods common to those kingdoms, but an Israel derived and developed from the existing nation but devoted to the Lord God and fully dedicated to his purpose, its policies and methods those of the celestial world rather than of this. That purified and renewed Israel must have - will have - renounced the defensive and offensive weapons and the commercial and social practices of this present world-order and will be relying entirely upon the power of God for its defense against aggression and for the stimulus they will need to go forward into their allotted destiny. The old historical examples of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem and the Moabite/Edomite invasion of Judah in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 King 19; 2 Chron. 20) are foreviews and examples of the quiet faith in which Israel of the last days will avow its faith in, and proclaim the imminence of, the open manifestation of the Lord from Heaven, accompanied by his Church, and face, undisturbed, the onset of the powers of this world determined to crush, at its inception, this challenge to their policies and power.

The 38th and 39th chapters of Ezekiel describe this last effort to resist the incoming kingdom of righteousness. The prophet took as the background to his picture the memorable invasion of the Middle East by Scythians from Siberia a few decades before his own day. Swarming down from the north, they overran Assyria, Syria, Israel and Judah, being brought to a halt only upon reaching the borders of Egypt. For ten years they held those lands in thrall, and then returned and vanished as suddenly as they had come. So, said Ezekiel, shall it be in the latter days. Israel will be a peaceful and prosperous nation, having renounced all material means of defense. "I will go up to the land of unwallled villages, to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a

spoil and to take a prey upon the people that are gathered out of the nations ... that dwell in the midst of the land". (Ezek. 38:11-12). So the 9th century Scythians under Gog their chieftain (Gog in the Old Testament), a people from the far corners of the earth previously unknown to Israel, became the symbol of the entire modern world, to its farthest recesses, uniting to eliminate the earthly people of the Lord, with all their principles of justice and benevolence and right dealing, from the face of the earth, in the endeavor to preserve their own selfish interests.

The rest of the story relates how the people await the coming of the host in complete faith that God will deliver - and He does. Without lifting a finger themselves, they see the enemy host fade away and be no more. The 14th chapter of Zechariah describes the same events and indicates, as does Isaiah in his 66th chapter, that those would-be marauding peoples, so far from being literally decimated in this conflict, become the subjects of missionary endeavor and conversion to Christ, when back in the countries from which they came, at the hands of the very nation they sought to destroy.

This is the point of time at which the powers of Heaven actively intervene in the affairs of the world. Mankind at large is unbelieving and oblivious to the unseen presence and power of the returned Lord, overruling the preliminaries to the winding up of the Age in the completion and gathering of the Church, the development and preparation of the holy nation Israel, the bringing the wars and famines and pestilences, the social and commercial maneuvers of this dying world, into focus at one culminating point which the Scriptures call Armageddon. This is the point at which men have to pass from their state of unbelief and indifference to realization and acceptance of the fact that the Lord Christ has indeed and in fact assumed the sovereignty of the world. The evidences will be too patent to ignore or refute. This is the point when the Lord's words in Matt. 24 have their fulfillment, "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". And more than that, they will accept him with acclamation. Says Isaiah, speaking of that event, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation (Isa. 25:9).

Is this "seeing" to be with the physical or mental sight? In past centuries the Lord was visualized descending majestically from the upper skies in a clearly visible human body-whether in 1st Century or 20th Century clothing has never been clearly defined, - surrounded by a halo of glory and attendant angels with trumpets, to take his seat on an earthly throne to conduct the Last Assize. The purpose as well as the nature of the Advent has been discerned and defined much more clearly since then, and the process of judgment to be more far-reaching than at one time was understood. He comes, not to condemn without hope but to "seek and save that which was lost ", so that the old twenty-four Day of Judgment, (which, it has been calculated, requires that the Lord would require to pronounce his judgment on some two hundred and seventy thousand men or women in every second of time in that twenty-four hours), develops into a thousand year Millennium in which all have known Christ only imperfectly or have never known him at all will be reached with the Gospel, and, if they respond, will be brought to a condition of acceptance with him and of eternal life. The "seeing" him is therefore something much more vital than the ocular response to a visible object. The patriarch Job, after his harrowing experiences following a formerly blameless and

prosperous life, did say "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee " (Job. 42:5). The Book of Hebrews says of Moses that "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible " (Heb. 11:27). Our Lord gave his flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51) and since his resurrection is no longer human, but is "the Lord that Spirit", restored to the glory He had with the Father before the world was (2. Cor. 3:17; John 17:5) and therefore incapable of detection by human ocular organs. He did though appear transiently after his resurrection in various human forms to facilitate communication as did angelic beings in Old Testament times. The question is largely academic -- we do not know what additional powers of perception appertain to the perfection of human nature when restored to the likeness of God which men do not possess today. We do not see Satan the enemy, banished from Heaven, but active in the earth, but we know that he is here. We do not see our Lord during this preliminary period prior to his revelation to the world, but we know that He is here. We do not see God, "whom no man has seen, nor can see " (1 Tim. 1:16) but our communion with him is none the less real on that account. But there is still much that we do not know.

Especially is this true with respect to our understanding of the nature of the celestial world. Mediaeval theology had no difficulty. Heaven was on a golden floor in the upper skies not too far away and there the Most High sat on a jeweled throne ruling all creation with an attendant choir of angels rendering everlasting anthems of praise. Any idea of purpose, of progress, of change, of continuing achievement, was absent. Heaven was a completely static condition of unalloyed peace and contentment. Whether the human spirit, implanted by God at the beginning, ever seeking fresh things to discover and fresh fields to conquer, could be satisfied with an eternity in which nothing new was ever discovered and nothing new was ever done may be open to question. It was Fred Hoyle, the noted astronomer, who in his agnostic days once said of the future life "All that the Christians have to offer me is an eternity of frustration ". Modern knowledge of the Divine Plan and the Divine purpose for humanity can save us from that. Whatever the nature of the celestial world and wherever its "geographical" location it must be a sphere of life and of being in which there is still progress, continuing increase in knowledge and continuing achievement. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him". So, in thinking of the Advent, or of our Lord in the fullness of time, "coming" from "there" to "here", we must abandon the purely earthly, material idea of a physical and visible descent through earth's atmosphere from some point in physical space where the Deity sits on an eternal throne and from which He superintends all things.

This visible universe is not the only sphere of life. The convictions of many testify that there is a world of living intelligence above and beyond the physical, not perceptible by any of the human senses but a real world nevertheless. Sometimes it is called the spiritual world and its citizens spiritual beings because it lies beyond the bounds of man's senses, and sometimes the celestial world because it lies beyond the bounds of man's geography. Our own universe is an atomic structure built up from ninety-two elements, ranging from hydrogen the lightest to uranium the heaviest - discounting a few heavier man-made ones - which, by chemical combination with each other, form all known substances, and powered by radiated energy vibrating at rates between a hundred thousand times a second and many many millions, technically called the "electro-magnetic spectrum". Everything in this universe obeys the laws set by this atomic structure and this energy range; what may lie outside of these, we do not

know and as men will never know since all our knowledge is derived from observational instruments which themselves are constructed from these atoms and can respond only to these energy vibrations. Our information regarding the celestial world comes to us through the Bible, the revelation of God, creator of both this world and that, supplemented a little in our own day by the reasoning of men whose deepening knowledge of the physical world is enabling them vaguely to see what possibilities may conceivably lie beyond it. At a conference of high level United States physicists in 1967, during a discussion on the problems of detecting life in space, it was said that we may no longer insist that life can only be manifested in material bodies such as ours, bodies of micro-cellular structure; there is no certainty that an entirely different form of life structure is not possible. At a rather earlier date another atomic physicist, appearing in a B.B.C. feature, referred to the possible existence of other universes dependent on other forces not capable of interaction with our own, so that they might conceivably exist, so to speak, on a different wave-length and be quite imperceptible to us although present in reality all the time. Firsoff, in "Life beyond the earth " (1963) suggests that there is "no reason why longer or shorter wavelengths" (than those of the electro-magnetic spectrum which govern all the phenomena of our universe) "could not form the basis of sensory perception we cannot be sure that there are no other forms of vibrant energy that could be so used. .. "Modern scientific thought no longer denies the possibility of world which is a real world but beyond our powers to perceive, inhabited by living intelligences who themselves cannot be perceived by man but can make their presence known, and communicate directly, to the human brain.

There are sufficient unknown quantities in the equation to justify care not to be too dogmatic in the details of Christ's coming. That He comes first to gather his Church to glory is fundamental. That He comes at a time when the entire world by reason of its own selfishness and greed and godlessness is rushing into self-inflicted destruction is foretold in the Scriptures. That a time comes when the fact that He has taken control of earth's affairs to the satisfaction of every right thinking person so that it can truly be said that every eye can see him is also so definitely stated that this must clearly be the climactic point of the Advent and the commencement of the de facto reign of the Lord over the nations cannot be disputed. Somewhere within this varied program of happenings comprising the Second Advent there is a point which meets the individual believer's conception of the entire process, and if, as is inevitable, some can see one aspect best and another, another, there can be no doubt that when all these things have come to pass every lover of the Lord will be supremely satisfied with the outcome. There will be no disharmony then.

Elihu, that young Arab philosopher of nearly four thousand years ago, wiser beyond his years, voiced sentiments (Job. 37:21-23) worthy of bearing in mind when the implications of the Advent are considered. For we know so little of that which is the other side of the Veil. But we do know that God is great, that He plans for the ultimate well-being of all mankind in an eternity of contentment and fulfillment. And the Second Advent is the means by which that era will be introduced. Elihu must have glimpsed something of that in his vision of the Deity.

"And now men cannot behold the bright light in the skies, for the light is not visible to all. It shines afar off in the heavens, as that which is from him in the clouds. Out of the north a

golden light cometh; upon God is fearful splendor. From the north come the clouds shining like gold; in these great is the glory and honor of the Almighty. We do not find another his equal in strength. The Almighty, whom we cannot find out, excellent in power, and injustice, and abounding in righteousness. He will not afflict. Wherefore men should reverence him, and the wise in heart will reverence him ".

The End