

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE SIGNS

THE NIGHT COMETH! Nor does it seem far off. It never appeared so nigh. The shadows are lengthening out, and falling with ominous gloom upon the valleys of the earth. The dimness of twilight is beginning to make itself felt. It is settling down drearily upon our cities, and on our solitudes; upon the towers of our strength and the places of our pomp: nor can the noisy rush of eager multitudes, hurrying to and fro for gain or pleasure, wholly stifle the utterance of fear and awe. Men cannot help foreboding evil, for who can tell them what may be in the womb of darkness! The night-birds are already on the wing, flitting around us, and reminding us of the descending night.

Yet it is written also, "The day is at hand!" The night, though dark, is brief, and is soon succeeded by a glorious day. But still of that day the night is the forerunner. And this world's night is surely near. Else, why so many indications of closing day?

But has it not been always thus? Have not other ages as well as the present been equally crowded with signs of trouble? Have not certain men always loved to be prophets of evil, and to interpret gloomily the events of their day? Is there not among many a morbid and unhealthy love of the dark and the ominous?

Be it so. It will not, however, be denied that the time must come when the crisis will arrive; and that before its arrival, it will give notice of its approach, by casting its shadows before. If such a crisis remains yet to be realized, then some age or other must be its precursor,—must lie next the precipice, and see with its own eyes the gulf below. It is right, no doubt, that we should be cautious, not misdating events nor miscalculating times, nor misjudging signs; but it is far safer to take swift alarm at what seem like tokens of evil, even though the alarm should prove false, than with incredulous, it

may be derisive, skepticism, to reject every sign, and refuse to be forewarned. It is bad, certainly, to be taking needless alarm; but it is incredibly worse to deny that we ought to take alarm at all, as if the days of the Lord would never really come, but was a mere empty name, hung over us for terror, age after age, as a check upon the world and a stimulus to the Church. If, then, that day be a certainty, a reality, who will affirm that, when about to arrive, it will not foreshow itself? Surely a dislike to give heed to the forebodings of judgment, must arise from a dislike to entertain even the thought of that crisis. We will not see in the events of the day, premonitory shocks of the last earthquake, because we would gladly discredit or post-pone that day of calamity and terror.

This is not wisdom. Neither is it magnanimity. It is folly; it is littleness of soul. It is a reckless resolution to blind ourselves to the evil as long as possible, and then to brave it, as best we may, when it does burst upon us. Or, there may be the secret thought beneath, "What if it should never come at all? What if we have colored the future with the gloom of our own fancies? What if the world is destined to pass through no such hurricane? What if we are to flow gently on into a fairer region, and a holier era, as winter dissolves itself softly into spring, or as spring expands itself into the brilliance of summer? At least the evil will not come in our day; we need not, then, vainly distract and alarm ourselves before the time."

But how have we discovered that the Lord will not come in our day? How have we ascertained that these signs, on which so many eyes are fixed, are delusive? Has God revealed it to us? Or, are we but guessing? Are we announcing as certain what we merely *wish* to be true? Why should it not come in our time? If it is to come in some age of the world, why not

in ours? Who are we that we should affirm concerning our age, that no evil shall come nigh it? Is there a spell upon our generation, that the evil cannot touch it, but must be charmed onward to another? Has the enlightenment of the day reared such an embankment round it that no flood can assail or overflow it? This, surely, is the security of fatalism. It is the dream of unbelief, or the opiate of worldliness, that is resolved to sleep on, unawakened by the unwelcome sound of threatening danger. If it be foolish to be always foreboding evil, it is worse than foolish to be recklessly closing the eye against the tokens of it, however numerous they may crowd upon us.

It may be said that these forebodings have so often been ashamed and discredited, that we are justified in giving no heed to them. In every age some have taken the alarm, and have been the prophets of evil that has never arrived. I do not deny this; neither do I wish to hide it. But what of this? Were they not wise men who took the earliest alarm, even though their fears were not realized? They read evil in the signs of the times, and they gave utterance to the feelings of their hearts, that their fellow-men might be aroused. This was not folly, neither was it weakness. It was true wisdom. They painted, perhaps, the signs darker than they really were. They drew more out of them than they were intended to prognosticate. And so, what was dreadful did not come to pass. Yet who will say that they were not truly wise, even though their alarm was premature,—far wiser than those who read nothing in those signs at all? Such men have often been derided as gloomy enthusiasts, who sought to cloud the mirth of a happy world, and whose failure was the suitable reward for their presumptuous folly. Yet folly was not with them. They might be sad and solemn, but they were not men of gloom or sternness. They had hearts as warm and true as ever throbbed within a human breast. It was not misanthropy; it was love—love to a heedless world rushing on to judgment unprepared, that drew forth their deep and awful utterances. It was rejected warnings that made them sad, and willing to hide their thoughts within their bosoms, if love would

have allowed it, if yearnings over dying multitudes had not constrained them to speak.

Notwithstanding, then, all the objections that are urged against interpreting the signs of the times, I shall, however briefly and imperfectly, make the attempt. Our Lord reproved the Pharisees for *not* doing this; and, having left us so many signs of His coming, will He hold us guiltless if we refuse to consider these, and prepare for His arrival? Those that object to our doing this, would not find fault with us if we would only so interpret the signs as to throw the Advent in the distance; that is to say, they admit the propriety of interpreting providential occurrences in some way or other; they cannot, therefore, consistently censure us for *attempt-ing* the interpretation; they can only maintain that our interpretation is faulty and unproved.

The signs which have been given us, both by the Lord and His apostles, are as notable as they are numerous. And it is very evident that those that have been selected which were the most expressive and least ambiguous. They are chosen as being the most prominent and explicit that could be given. It cannot be thought that the least striking have been announced, and the most striking concealed. If so, then is it not very remarkable that the Millennium is never mentioned as a sign at all? Had this been to take place before the Advent, how has it never been alluded to as one of the signs? It would have been by far the most distinct and visible. No one could overlook and mistake it. Yet nowhere, by prophets or apostles, or by the Lord himself, is it noted as a sign. How can this be accounted for, save upon the ground that it was to take place *after*, not *before* the Advent? If this be admitted, all is plain; if it be denied, then let those who deny it account for the fact, that among the many signs of the coming the Millennium is never mentioned as one. *Why* the most evident of them all should be omitted, seems to me to require an explanation. On the post-millennial system, the omission seems to me to be inexplicable; for thus our Lord would be made to profess to tell us the signs of His appearing, and yet to conceal the most notable of them all.

But this is not all. The signs which are given are inconsistent with the idea of a Millennium before the coming. It is not merely that a certain event is not mentioned, but that those events which are mentioned preclude the possibility of such an event lying concealed among them. Who that reads the Lord's prophecy, which begins with the destruction of Jerusalem, and ends with His appearing in the clouds of heaven, does not feel that the whole drift of it was to show the Church that she was to expect sorrow, not joy, tribulation, not triumph, up to the time when He should return? These signs were the successive crests of the billows on which she was to be tossed, till He, with His own voice and presence, should rebuke the tempest and calm the ocean. The simple omission, then, of the Millennium as a sign, is a fact on which we ought to lay much stress; but the omission of it, in circumstances which preclude the possibility of its being a thing put aside or merely unspoken, furnishes a strong argument in favor of a pre-millennial Advent.

But without further adverting to this point, let me now note some of the signs which in the present day seem most remarkable as forerunners of the Lord's appearing. And though of some of these it might be said that they have been found in former days, yet others of them, as we shall see, are peculiar to our own:—

1. *The Maturity of the Papal Antichrist.*—Popery itself is no new thing in the earth, so that its mere existence is no peculiar sign of the last days. But its progress and prevalence are new. There is a maturity about it which in other ages it could not claim. It is rising in stature and hastening to its consummation. With stealthy foot she has been advancing step by step, till now she walks abroad at noonday with the sound of the trumpet, lifting up her head in bold defiance, and exulting in the consciousness of recovered mastery. Her hand, like Amalek's, is "upon the throne of the Lord;" and she acts and speaks as if in nothing she would be restrained of all that she has imagined to do.

2. *The Diffusion of Infidelity.*—This at least is new. Our fathers knew comparatively little of

this, and our father's fathers almost nothing. An infidel was rare indeed in their day; a man wondered at and shunned. Towards the close of the last century, infidelity burst forth in France, and partially extended itself elsewhere. Of late years it has developed itself with prodigious swiftness, and assumed a bold and lofty attitude of assault. Its extent is incredible. The masses are thoroughly leavened with it. It has insinuated itself everywhere, and is eating out the very heart of everything like deep principle among men. It has corroded the cement by which society clings together, so that nations and communities are now like walls or towers without mortar, ready to fall to pieces of themselves, or be leveled by the first blast. Its ferocity is alarming; its activity unceasing. Much of it is undisguised and confessed, but very much of it is secret and unavowed. It taints the air; it blights life; it ossifies conscience; under it, all good things wither. It is the worm at the root of all that is noble and excellent in these last days. Hence the *hollow* condition of things amongst us; the chill that is upon life's warm fellowships and offices of love. Conscience is palsied; the *heart* of the people is gone. Social, political, kindred ties are wormeaten, and ready to break asunder. The erect bearing and manly vigor which religion imparts is no longer visible. Superstition has come to the rescue, and is trying to supply its place. But in vain. Expedience rules. Large masses of people are either openly or secretly infidel, if not atheistical. God is not acknowledged. His yoke seems to gall men's shoulders. The nations are ready to cast it off. And what hope is there, what token, that this is to end before the Lord return to end it?

3. *The Increase of Immorality.*—Like a flood it is swelling and widening its course. It is without shame and without fear. Truth is fast going out of human language; confidence between man and man is leaving human life; friendships are bare and empty, little more than selfish conveniences; even oaths are frail,—in most cases forms, in many, mockeries—

“And, clad like honesties, the falsehoods
move
Along the world.”

CONSCIENCE is gone: tenderness of spirit is known only in our works of fiction; noble-mindedness is to be found only on the monument of the dead. The heart of the nation, nay, of the world, has been tampered with and vitiated, till it is ready for almost any excess of evil: the life-blood is tainted, and hence the loathsome sores that are breaking forth, betokening the depth and virulence of the taint—“the ineradicable taint of sin.” Crimes that our fathers knew not are common among the nations. Licentiousness riots fearfully, perpetuating deeds without a name, so that “it is a shame even to speak of those things that are done of them in secret.” Drunkenness staggers along every street. Blasphemy pours itself fourth, till we shudder, and close the ear against its horrid sounds. Murder has broken loose, and every day our newspapers are telling some horrid tale of bloodshed; man slaying his fellow-man, in fiendish hatred, or more fiendish love of gain; none spared; the parent butchering his children, the child his parent, the husband the wife, the wife the husband: no sanctity of relationship is any safeguard from the poison, or the bullet, or the knife, or the more brutal hammer. Oh, what a cry is going up to heaven from this land of ours; the cry of innocent blood, blood which a righteous God will yet avenge! But the picture of our spreading immorality is one not easily drawn, save by the record of *facts*,—facts which one man scarcely ventures to whisper to another, too awful to be laid bare before the public eye. It calls for a prophet’s eye to see it, a prophet’s pen to record it, and a prophet’s soul to weep over it “in secret places” before the Lord. Men are truly “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphem-ers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” [II Tim. 3:2-4]. All this is

to come to pass in the last days, and to wax worse and worse till the Lord come.

4. *The Prevalence of Superficiality and Formalism in Religion.*—Form without power, a body without a soul, religion without vitality; these are among the signs of the last days. The show of piety is widespread, but the thing itself occupies a narrow circle. There is much profession, but profession lies on the surface, and underneath all may be worldliness. Depth and solidity are wanting; the aspect of religion is unhealthy; the fresh hue of primitive times is departed; the intense vitality which of right belongs to it, is dried up; so that, instead of its being the living source of motion to the world without, controlling, or counteracting, or impelling its currents, it lies inert and passive, at the mercy of every outward movement. It is a worldly, self-pleasing religion, adopted for fashion’s sake, and used according to convenience. We look in vain for the profound sense of sin, the simple faith which the Church once mani-fested, the solemn, unearthly walk which she once pursued. We are mere imitators of godliness; we “steal our words one from another.” Hence we are driven about with every wind of doctrine, having no stability, no anchorage, save that which the inertness of death affords.

Satan has now transformed himself into an angel of light, and under this fair disguise he is working with marvelous success. He is teaching us to build the tombs of our fathers, that we may rest content with the mere approbation of their principles without any imitation of their practice. He leads some astray into fatal error, under the pretext of candor and love of truth; others he saturates with the orthodoxy of the head, that they may become indifferent to the state of their heart before God. Some he persuades to deny the Bible; to others he lauds it, that he may make it a substitute for the God of the Bible. He cries up faith, that he may set it as a substitute for the object of faith. With some he denies the possibility of assurance, that he may keep them from the peace of God; with others he maintains the necessity of it, only in order that he may lead them to make a god of it, and substitute their being sure of salvation

for believing in the Savior. He cries down the Arminianism of making works our Savior, that he may lead us into the more subtle delusion of making a Savior of our faith. He allows us a wide range of religious feeling and sentiment, if he can only succeed in making them a substitute for God. He hinders not our being serious, earnest, solemn, if he can thereby feed the cravings of a restless, empty soul with something which may prevent us from seeking the bread of life. He permits us to denounce the world's vanity and hollow pleasures; to be weary of its unsatisfying round of folly, that he may delude us into the idea that this dissatisfaction with the world is a proof that we are religious, and thereby cause us to sit down contented, when yet a great way off from our Father's house. He tolerates the circulation of useful, nay, of religious knowledge, that we may rest satisfied with something short of the fullness of God himself. He may countenance, too, the routine of religious societies or Church courts, and the false excitement of crowded assemblies, eloquent speeches, glowing reports, that he may administer thereby that opiate to the soul by which it may be kept in a delusive day-dream, which seems so like "the sober certainty of waking bliss," that we cannot think of breaking the luxury of the pleasant spell. He inculcates the necessity of providing for our children what is called a liberal education, that he may make that a substitute for a father's blessing and a mother's prayers. He urges the obligation of Christian liberality, the necessity of large funds, that he may bring men to rest religious enterprise upon funds, not upon faith,—upon prudence, not on prayer.

These outward things may be in themselves right and good, but what are they without the indwelling Spirit? What is truth without the True One? What is the perfection of Church order without the vital power from above? The body is there, but the living spirit has fled; the altar and the sacrifice are there, but the fire from heaven descends not; the temple is perfect, and the worshippers are thronging its courts, but the glory is departed; Jehovah has left His shrine!

5. *The Strange and Incongruous Mixture of Opinions that Prevails.*—Men's imaginations seem to be let loose in every direction in inventing these; science, philosophy, literature, theology, are all shooting forth a rank luxuriance of foliage, which is even already producing a harvest of incongruous opinions. The crudities that are often issuing forth under sanction of these venerable names are such as to make one at times tremble lest truth itself should be drifting from her anchorage. These are the "unclean spirits, like frogs, which proceed out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." They are well said to be "like frogs;" in themselves croaking, contemptible agencies, yet insinuating themselves everywhere, and defiling all places, even the most sacred, with their loathsomeness, and annoying the general ear with their incessant unmeaning noise. These are they whom Satan is now sending forth, in this the cloudy dusk of the world's declining day, to form a triple alliance between powers hitherto at war with each other, animating them by one spirit to fight against the Lord and His anointed. Of these are the thousand organs of the infidel press, sending abroad its croaking progeny and leavening the nations with the subtle poison of its atheistical politics, and the damnable delusions of its pantheistical theology: from the contamination of whose foul principles (as in Egypt during the plague of frogs) none but God's chosen Israel shall be exempt; for "they shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect." And when is it that these spirits of devils "go forth to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty?" It is just before the Advent. They have been going forth already, and are still going forth: and they shall continue their horrid work of gathering the nations into their great slaughter-house, till the Lord come; for it is added immediately, "Behold, I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments" (Rev. 16:15).

6. *Dissociality.*—The coherence of the whole social system is very precarious. Nay, the coherence of its minute component parts, its communities, its neighborhoods, its families, is very slight indeed; if, indeed, it may not be said to be already loosed and dissevered. It is as if our very atmosphere possessed decomposing power. The cement of society has at length given way to the corrosive influence of wickedness. Man's native selfishness is in the ascendancy. It has burst over its restraints, and is now triumphing. Melancholy triumph for the world! For with it all that is fair and goodly, all that is large-hearted and loving, all that binds us to each other in charity and brotherhood, all that is generous and disinterested, must before long utterly decay. The world is at length breaking up. Like a stranded vessel over which sea after sea has been driving, it can no longer hold together. Its timbers are parting, and it will soon be a total wreck. God meant the human family to be but one household, knit together in love and brotherhood as well as blood. There has been little enough of this true oneness hitherto; but still there has been some. But now it is disappearing. The family, instead of being like a compact rock, close-knit in all its parts, is fast becoming a mere mound of sand, whose particles have no cohesion, no union, save that of casual, temporary nearness, and whose mass the first springtide will level and sweep away. *Self* is now in full maturity and action. Suspicion of each other is one of the rules of life. It is not possible that the social fabric can cling long together. And who shall *re-cement it*? Who shall restore the lost unity, and reproduce the vanished confidence? He who comes to make all things new. Things have been allowed to fall into decay, and to continue to crumble down, atom by atom, till He should come, that His should be the glory or remodeling and reconstructing the fallen fabric; and that His might be through eternity the praise, not only of bringing a redeemed Church through death to resurrection-life, and perfection, but of bringing creation through decay and ruin to restitution-life, stability, and comeliness.

7. *Religious Deceivers.*—The extent to which these are flourishing in our day is much overlooked. We have grown so familiar with strange opinions that we have almost ceased to notice them. Yet in all countries and in all Churches these are springing up. Besides the great leaders of superstition in our day, Romanists, Jesuits, and Tractarians, there are the Unitarians, the Mormons, the Latter-Day Saints, the Swedenborgians, and such like, who are all saying, "Lo, here is Christ!" or, "Lo, there!" Incredible and absurd as these systems are, they are believed in by thousands, who seem to be given over "to strong delusion that they should believe a lie." There are many other sects of which we have only casual notices sometimes in public journals. And then, in addition to these, there are sad heresies springing up around us in various forms, and indicating a restless, feverish state of mind, which must, ere long, issue in something more hideous and fatal. On the one hand, we have tradition subverting revelation, and making itself the standard or religious truth; on the other, we have reason doing precisely the same thing, and subjecting every doctrine to the interrogation, Is it reasonable? Some deny the Godhead of the Son, because it seems *unreasonable*. Others deny the eternity of punishment, because it is *unreasonable*. Others deny the materiality of hell, because it is *unreasonable*. Others make away with election, because it is *unreason-able*. Thus reason, which is *the tradition of the present*, as thoroughly and as profanely sets aside Scripture as does the authority of the fathers, which is *the tradition of the past*. And then there are proud attempts to soar above the morality of the Bible, not only the morality of the Old Testament, but also of the New. As Popery established a pretended *purity* far above that which the Bible commanded, "forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats;" so modern reason is engaged in devising and promulgating a new *morality*, professing a far nobler standard than that which God has enjoined. How many are almost ready to condemn the Bible, because it has not condemned war as sin, and who, in their Peace Societies, are assuming

a position and inculcating principles which the Bible never taught them! How many are equally ready to denounce the Bible, because it contains no denunciations against slavery; but calmly addresses both the master and the slave, saying, "Whatsoever good thing a man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free!" How many almost scoff at the Bible, because it inculcates no total-abstinence morality, but simply urges temperance as the Christian's duty! How many look with wonder or horror upon the cruelty of Scripture morality in countenancing, nay, commanding the taking of life for life! How many look down contemptuously upon the weekly restraint of a Sabbath, proudly giving as their reason that *they* consider that every day should be dedicated to God! In what is all this to end? Doubtless in something very disastrous. Man's morality must take the place of God's; nay, God himself be superceded in the government of His own world. Scripture must soon give way entirely before men who profess to have attained to a higher level, and reached a purer morality; a morality which antiquates and supercedes all that God has revealed. The world is not yet prepared for the full proclamation of the principles thus given forth in the germ. But it may soon be so. The flood-gates cannot much longer resist the pressure; and what a deluge will that be which shall then issue forth upon the world! Is it not, then, by these things that "we know that it is the last time," and that "the end of all things is at hand?"

8. *Wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, and famines in divers places.*—I need not enter minutely into the proof of the existence of these. The news of every week may bear witness to it. For a while, it seemed almost as if the world were at rest, as if its storms had spent themselves. But now all seems changed. Every day brings new indications of disquietude and convulsion. In every region,—continent or island, wilderness or fruitful plain,—there are wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes. Few nations seem willing to draw the sword, yet every nation has her hand upon the hilt; with some it is always gleaming in the air, and with others it is reddened with blood.

Over the whole earth is heard "the long, low, distant murmur of dreaded sound." And is this not the prelude to the last universal war? Is it not a sign of the near approach of Him who, when earth's madness and ambition are at their height,—when the summoned nations are gathered at Armageddon, girt for battle and slaughter, Himself appears for their discomfiture and ruin? Then, but not till then, wars shall cease, and the weapons of war perish. Then the true Solomon shall begin his reign, hushing the tumults of the nations, and introducing their long-expected Sabbath of this weary "work-day world."

9. *The restlessness of the world.*—This sign is in part connected with the preceding, yet may be viewed separately. The state of the world is at present very ominous. "Looking after the things that are coming on the earth" is God's picture of the state of men as the crisis draws on. This certainly seems our attitude at this moment. The earth and the things that are coming on it attract the attention of all. There is something in the state of the world so unsettled, so pregnant with uncertain evil, that every eye is moving to and fro in expectation of strange issues, and as if to catch the first sign of their approach. The form and color of the clouds forebode speedy change, and threaten tempest to the nations. The time for listlessness and apathy is gone. Some thirty years ago, when the skies were bright, and men could promise themselves days of sunshine, it was safe enough to fold the hands and take our ease. But all this is over. No doubt, after the excitement through which we have passed, men would prefer repose. But the onward swell of the waters stays not for an hour. There is among the nations a spirit of restlessness, anarchy, and insubordination; a passionate love of change, a headlong rush to overturn every established system, too furious and united to be ultimately withstood. Many call it but a passing tumult, the frenzy of an hour; but they who understand it know how deep is the spring out of which it flows. The storm, long gathering, but resisted and repressed by the barriers which ancient wisdom had erected for the stability of kingdoms, is concentrating and condensing its

strength in these venerable recesses, which may for a while refuse to yield to the explosive force, but which, overstrained at length, give way to the accumulated pressure; the kingdoms of the earth are trembling; throne and temple are overturned; wall and fortress are laid in ruins. Such is the night which is to precede the long-looked for day,—when not only Israel but the whole earth shall arise and put on the garments of beauty, fit and meet for the presence of their glorious King.

10. *Missions.*—No age since that of the apostles has witnessed such widespread exertions in behalf of the Jewish and Gentile nations as our own. This, certainly, is a sign peculiar to the present century. I do not defend all that has been done by Missionary and Bible Societies; but still I would point to the fact of hundreds of missionaries going forth to every region of our globe, millions of Bibles circulated,—almost every nation having the Scriptures in their own language,—and, pointing to these simple but magnificent facts, I ask, is there not in these a most evident fulfillment of the words of the Lord, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all nations for a witness, and then shall the end come?” [Matt. 24:14]. In our day we have the universal preaching of the gospel. The result, however, is not the conversion of the world, but the gathering out of the election. And then “the end” comes! It is not said, and then the Millennium comes. But *the end*—the end of the age, the coming of the Son of Man. This sign seems also that referred to in Revelation 14:6, “I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel, to preach unto them that dwell on the earth.” How evident the sign! It will, I doubt not, become more and more visible,—but still, there it is already before us,—a sign which foretells a coming Lord, and most distinctly intimates the impossibility of a Millennium before His advent.

11. *Israel.*—This long-forgotten nation is now coming into remembrance. The nations of the earth are beginning to observe this strange people, “terrible from the beginning hitherto” [Isa. 18:2, 7]. The eye both of the world and of the Church are far more intently directed

towards them than they have been since the day that their city perished, and they were led captive into the land of the stranger. It is curious to observe how both travelers and missionaries are continually making new discoveries with regard to Israel, stumbling upon some new fragment of their lost tribes. God seems to be breaking up inaccessible territories, in order to bring to view the hiding-places of His ancient people, and to open their prison doors. A goodly number are now also turning their eyes to the cross. The “remnant according to the election of grace” [Rom. 11:5] is visibly coming in. The interest taken in the Jews everywhere is very striking. God is once more placing them before the eyes of the world, as those through whom He has blessed the world in times past, and through whom He means to bless it again. But when is this? Not till “the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and then turn away ungodliness from Jacob” [Rom. 11:26]. Not till “they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn” [Zech. 12:10]. The full salvation of Israel is reserved for the coming of their Messiah. Then, but not till then, shall “Israel blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” [Isa. 27:6].

12. *Disbelief of the approaching Advent even in the Church.*—It is no marvel that the world should either deride or deny that event. And it is of the world’s mocking that Peter speaks when he says, “There shall come in the last days scoffers, saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” [II Pet. 3:3-4]. But the Church also loses sight of that day; nay, refuses to credit the news of its approach. She says, “My Lord delayeth his coming” [Matt. 24:48]. She slumbers and sleeps. And it is just when she is speaking thus, and thus slumbering; it is in an hour when she thinks not, that He arrives. It is often said, Surely, if the time were just at hand, more of God’s people would believe it. But it is when many of them are not believing it, and counting on delay, that the Bridegroom comes.

13. *Efforts of self-regeneration.*—I do not say this of the Church, though there are some tokens of it even in her. But I speak of the world. Man seems now to be putting forth every effort to regenerate himself without God.

Amid the achievements of science and of art, he has lost sight of his own helplessness and dependence on Him who created him. He thinks to be a God to himself. It as if, before God's glorious purpose of restitution is brought to pass, man is to be allowed to do his utmost for the renewal of himself and of the world. He is to be put to the proof. He is to be permitted to boast himself for a little, and congratulate himself upon the triumph before him. Hence the vain-glorious speeches we so often hear, of man's powers and man's prospects. Political reforms are spoken of as the regeneration of the world. One party most loudly maintains that the separation of Church and State is to usher in the Millennium; another as boldly affirm that it is the union of these that is to accomplish this. Education, science, literature, philosophy, are called the world's regenerators, and no limits are assigned to the blessings which these are to confer upon the world. It is curious, also, to observe, within these ten years past, how eagerly science has been putting forth all its energies in pursuit of discoveries that shall restore fruitfulness to the soil. Agricultural chemistry has shot up into a separate study. As if unconsciously prescient of the earth's deliverance from the curse of barrenness, men are laboring to do all that science can, to hasten on that day of restitution. These efforts at self-regeneration must prove abortive; for man cannot undo either his sin or its consequences. They may succeed to a certain extent; but only to prove how little they can effect. They are, however, sure signs of a coming deliverance. For when man's endeavors have proved fruitless, both in reference to himself and the soil which he tills, God shall at length interpose, and accomplish the work of renovation by the word of His power.

14. *The spread of knowledge.*—Many are running to and fro, and knowledge is increasing. Nor is it knowledge of one kind, but of every kind, secular and sacred. It is, however, for the former that this age is specially distinguished. And Satan is putting forth his utmost resources of power and craft thus to lead men captive of his will. "The prince of all knowledge (as one wrote twenty years ago),

where God is not known; of all power, where God is not acknowledged; the bright archangel of the natural man, revealing himself in his angelic glories of natural knowledge, natural beauty, natural wisdom, and natural humanity." Thus does he play his part in this last age! Under these radiant disguises, he is bewildering the eyes of men, and persuading them that this diffusion of knowledge is the breaking of the millennial dawn. So specious are his counterfeits, that it is hard to separate the real from the false, the precious from the vile; for when he thus comes forth as an angel of light, clothed in every perfection that the natural heart loves, and the carnal eye admires, who shall penetrate the deception and escape the snare, save those who "know all things," by reason of "the unction from the Holy One?" [I John 2:20]. Most truly (as one has remarked), has the present state of the world been described by one of the world's own poets, when picturing the gay glitter of an evening assembly, over which was thrown

"A dazzling mass of artificial light,
Which showed all things, but nothing as
they were."

So it is now upon the earth, among the heedless multitudes of the children of men It is the world's midnight. They are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Literature, science, art, philosophy, are all their own! Yet there is an artificial coloring, an unreal brightness, over all. There is music, but it is of the siren kind; not the deep melody of old ancestral song. There is eloquence, too, but it is "the words of man's wisdom," not that which speaks for God and "winneth souls." There is fervor, too, but it is the warmth of wild excitement, born in novelty and nursed by perpetual change. There is high thought, too, but it is often of an unhealthy cast, wrought off at the midnight lamp; not the deep musings begot in fellowship with God, and ceaseless converse with that Word which maketh wise the simple.

Along with all this, there is a proud air of independence, like that which said, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" [Ps. 12:4].

There is a reckless determination to hold what opinions men please, unchecked and unproved. And, then, in connection with this, many are loud in maintaining, on the one hand, the harmlessness of error, and on the other, the omnipotence of truth. No doubt, upon fallen beings, error must fall innocuous, and truth prove itself resistless. But in this fallen world, error cannot be so innocent, nor truth so omnipotent, as some suppose. Were this the native country of truth; were the atmosphere of this world its native air, we might hope to see it spring up in rich and spontaneous luxuriance. But so long as Satan is the god of this world—"the prince of the power of the air," truth must ever be an alien to the soil. "It bears a bright golden flower, but not in this region." The sentiment I allude to is one of Satan's most subtle sophistries, by means of which he hopes to succeed in confounding truth and error. "*Magna est veritas et prævalebit,*" is the adage of antiquity. I believe it. I know that there is in reserve for truth a glorious triumph in the ages to come, even upon this dark earth; but this shall not be by its own might, but by the Spirit of the Lord. It is not science and philosophy that are to regenerate the world. They are evidences that the predicted time is come when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." But the "march of intellect" is not the triumph of truth. They are signs of promised day,—

"last in the train of night,
If better they belong not to the dawn;"

but they are neither the star of morning nor the sun of righteousness. They shall grace the triumph of truth, but not as confederate allies, to whom in part belongs the glory of the victory, but only as captives bound to its chariot-wheels. Truth *shall* prevail! But not till HE who is TRUTH shall come to lead it on to victory. Then its present obscurity will only enhance its future exaltation. The darkness, which now wraps it, conceals, but cannot mar it; and, like the face of heaven when the clouds pass off, which hide, but spoil not its spotless azure, it shall merge unstained.

These are but a few of the many "signs of the times." Of some of these it may be affirmed that they belong specially to our own day, not having been witnessed by any former age. Of others we may say, that, though seen in other ages, they have shone out far more fully and decidedly in our own. No previous age could point to signs so many and so vivid as ours can do; and it is this that renders our position so very solemn and responsible. No thoughtful mind will hastily reject them, even though not wholly satisfied; for even though they may appear defective, yet there is much about them that is not improbable; and what if, after all, they should be true?

The facts to which I have been adverting exist. It becomes us in good earnest to inquire, What do they mean, what do they indicate?

It was the aberrations of one of our exterior planets that gave the first notice to astronomers of the presence of another orb, outside our present planetary region; so it is the strange aberrations, the irregular movements of things around us, that reveal to the well-taught eye of the Church the near approach of that Star which has been so long absent from our system. And as, when the suggestion was given forth to the students of science, many a telescope was forthwith pointed to the quarter where the predicted stranger was predicted to present itself; so when the signs of the times proclaim so audibly "The Lord is at hand," should not every eye be turning upwards to the heavens from which He is to descend in glory, and every heart throbbing at the thought that He shall so soon be here? How many astron-omers are now reproaching themselves, because they were so slow to credit the calculations of science, and be the first to catch a glimpse of the expected planet. And how far more truly, more deeply bitter may be our reproaches hereafter, if we turn coldly away from the announcement, "Behold He cometh," and find ourselves shut out from the blessedness of the promise, "I will give him the Morning Star."

It is now more than three thousand years since God gave to His Church one of her gladdest, richest songs by the mouth of Hannah, in the day when her tribulation was at

an end, and the desire of her heart had been given. It is a song of vast prophetic fullness,—a song as marvelous in compass as it is magnificent in thought:—

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
He lifteth the beggar from the dunghill,
To set them among princes,
And to make them inherit the throne of
glory;
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,
And He hath set the world upon them.
He will keep the feet of His saints,
And the wicked shall be silent in darkness,
For by strength shall no man prevail.
The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken
to pieces;
Out of heaven shall He thunder upon them.
Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth;
He shall give strength unto his King,
And exalt the horn of his Anointed.”

All this, of course, was full of meaning, even in that early period in which it was uttered; yet how dim that meaning must have been to those who saw these predicted events only afar off! But, like all other prophetic songs, this has gathered fullness as it passed along the ages. Each age has imparted light to it, and dispersed shade after shade. Each generation of the Church has drawn out of it a wider and a profounder meaning. Till now, in this last age, we can take it up and sing it, line after line, with an understanding and an emphasis unknown in earlier days. For the last time is at hand, and the projected shadows of the future are becoming every day sharper in their outline, and more intelligible in their motions.

The day is at hand when the poor shall be raised out of the dust, set among princes, and made to inherit the throne of glory; when the Lord shall establish the world upon its pillars, that it may not be moved for ever. *Now* He keepeth the feet of His saints, but *then* He shall break their enemies in pieces like a potter’s vessel, sending forth His lightnings to scatter them and consign them to the blackness of darkness forever. *Now* the wicked are exalted, but *then* Jehovah shall judge the ends of the earth, giving strength unto His own anointed

King, crowning Him with the “many crowns,” and investing Him with glory and dominion for ever. What a spectacle shall the new earth then present, when delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God!—Once more meet for God to look upon and worthy to be the dwelling-place of His eternal Son! Once more linked to heaven by the true ladder of which Jacob saw but the symbol; angels of God ascending and descending, in blessed fellowship and ministries of love! Once more fit to take rank in creation, not, as hitherto, an outcast planet doomed to darkness, but radiant all over with holy beauty, the seat of government and center of influence to the unmeasured universe around.

And how soon shall present night be forgotten in the brightness of the endless day! How soon shall the curse give place to the blessing, barrenness be exchanged for fruitfulness, and all pollution be swept clean away! It is but “a little while” and all shall be well! Another night’s tossing on the billows, and then the calm of the eternal morn! One more outburst of the “warring winds,” and then all storms are hushed, and the long dissonances of time melt into the one harmony of creation’s boundless song!

THE END

Lord, as taught by thee, we pray
That sin and death may end;
In the great Millennial day,
With all thy saints descend.

Come no more a man of woe,
Come, and all thy grandeur show;
King of kings, appear again,
Glorious with thine ancients reign.

*Charles Wesley
on Daniel 2, 12*