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ARTICLE IV.

ON THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST IN REGARD TO HIS
THEN FUTURE COMINGS, AND THE PHRASEOLOGY OF
THE APOSTLES ON THIS SUBJECT.

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THIS subject has a broad range of practical bearings, particularly on these two points: the true method of contemplating the now future coming of Christ in order to derive from it the best moral results; and the subject of inspiration as involved in the question, whether the apostles were or were not mistaken in their views of the time of Christ's second coming. That the latter point needs discussion no man intelligent in regard to the views extensively held, both by learned and unlearned expositors, can doubt. Some men of great erudition maintain that Paul's view of the time of Christ's second coming underwent an important change between the date of his first Epistle to the Thessalonians and of his second. If so, was he inspired in a lower degree when he wrote the first, and in a higher when he wrote the second? Or will it be said that in one or both of these letters his inspiration did not reach this particular subject? Among men moving in the common walks of life the view is somewhat current that the apostles actually expected the final coming of Christ within their own lifetime, in such a sense *near* that it might occur any night before morning. Some believe that they taught this as a fact; others that they thought it expedient for the best moral impression to assume it, and to speak *as if* it were so; the points actually believed by them being only these, that the precise time was not revealed, and that nothing forbade its being so near that it might break upon the world at any moment. Now, let it be well considered, if the apostles taught the near coming

of Christ for the final judgment *as a fact*, they were simply mistaken, and we have grave difficulties to dispose of under the question of their real inspiration ; or, if they held that nothing forbade its being so near that it *might* break upon the world during their own lifetime, and therefore, for the sake of the best moral impression, men should be exhorted to expect it daily as a possible, and perhaps probable, event, then we have to meet this difficulty : Is it supposable that their views of the gospel age, and of its predicted work under its then opening dispensation, were so very limited and so exceedingly imperfect ? These remarks will probably suffice to show that the subject calls for thorough and careful examination.

As already indicated, we propose two main subjects of inquiry :

First, The teachings of Christ in regard to his then future comings.

Second, The phraseology of the apostles in speaking upon this subject.

It will be found convenient, not to say important, to examine these points separately.

THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST IN REGARD TO HIS COMINGS THEN FUTURE.

At the outset we are met with the fact that Jesus speaks of more than one then future coming. In some passages he speaks of coming within the lifetime of that generation ; in other passages, he comes at the close of the present world, in connection with the resurrection and the final judgment. Of the former class is Matt. x. 23, in which, having commissioned the twelve to preach to the lost sheep of Israel, he says : " When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another ; for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel *until the Son of Man be come.*" Also Matt. xvi. 28 : " Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." As

recorded by Mark (ix. 1) the words are "shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power"; while Luke gives it, "till they see the kingdom of God." These various phrases show that Christ sometimes spake of himself as *coming* in those signal events and manifestations of power which pre-eminently established his gospel kingdom during that primitive age, i.e. within the first century. But let us notice the context of the last cited passage from Matt. xvi. 27, 28. Having said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself"; "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Jesus adds, "For the Son of Man *shall come* in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works"; after which follow the words: "There be some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Here manifestly, vs. 27 refers to his coming for the final judgment, for he comes "in the glory of his Father"; "with his angels"; for the final reward of *every man* according to his works; points which most distinctly identify the final judgment (compare Matt. xxv. 31-46). Yet his next words refer to entirely another coming, long anterior to the final one. Why is this? Certainly not because the two comings are one *in time*; but apparently because the earlier one may represent the later, would be in some points analogous, would involve to some extent the same principles of God's government, and therefore the nearer one, falling within the lifetime of some then before him, would serve to illustrate, and perhaps still more to verify, the one far more remote. Mark also in his parallel passage has each of these comings in mind; the final one in the words: "When he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (viii. 38); the earlier one in the words: "Till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power"; this coming with power being such a manifestation of divine judgment on a guilty nation as will both certify and illustrate the awful fact of his final coming in judgment upon the whole race. Precisely this analogy gives us (we suggest) the key to the

remarkable blending of Christ's nearer coming with the more remote one which runs through Matt. xxiv. xxv. (The parallel passages are Mark xiii. and Luke xxi.). This discourse of the Lord was occasioned by the question of his disciples: "Tell us, when shall these things be? (i.e. the vast temple buildings laid in ruins) and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

On this prophetic discourse of our Lord the following points may be suggested: (a) Since it was occasioned by the special questions above cited, it may be assumed that Jesus answered those questions to some extent; perhaps not perfectly and to all the points made, but as far as he deemed it wise, and in the way he judged most useful. (b) Their questions make two points very clearly, viz. the *date* of the destruction of the temple, and its premonitory *signs*. To these points it will be seen Jesus made very definite answers. (c) Whether they also inquired when the *present world*, in our sense of the phrase, should end, i.e. in the general resurrection and judgment, has been doubted; this doubt turning on their sense of the phrase, "the end of the world." If (as seems probable) they took up this phrase from Christ's use of it (Matt. xiii. 39, 40, 49): "The harvest is the end of the world;" "So shall it be in the end of the world," etc., then they clearly had reference to Christ's final coming; and Jesus answered to this point, (1) by declaring that the time of this final coming is known to none but the Father; (2) by giving (as in Matt. xxv. 31-46) a very minute and sublime account of this final coming in the glory of the Father for final judgment and eternal retribution. (d) The leading, and I think we may say, the main points in this discourse are those two which stand forth so certainly, clearly, and prominently in the questions asked, pertaining to his nearer coming to destroy Jerusalem. Remarkably, Matthew only has recorded that part of his discourse which appears in Matt. xxv. 31-46, while Luke has nothing in his entire report of this discourse which does not apply readily to the nearer coming; facts which seem to show that this discourse, as a whole, impressed

the disciples much more in its relations to the fall of their city and temple than in its relations to the final coming to judgment. (e) The points of chief difficulty in this discourse (Matt. xxiv.) are of this sort ; whether the latter part of it, and especially vs. 29-31 and Mark xiii. 24-27, refer at all to Christ's final coming, and if so, on what principle we shall discriminate between what refers to the nearer coming and what to the remote one ; or, if we discard the idea of discrimination, and apply the same words to both events, then why are they so blended together ; and have we any means of ascertaining what Christ did really teach concerning the first coming and what concerning the second ? Here it is in place to say that this manner of speaking of these two comings in very close connection is not peculiar to this discourse. It appears, as already shown, in Matt. xvi. 27, 28. Comparing that discourse with this, it seems obvious that Jesus designed to make the nearer coming both prove to men the certainty of the more remote one and develop its ground principles. These two objects were of the utmost consequence, especially at that time. Plainly Jesus did not deem it then so desirable as we now do to discriminate broadly between what belonged to the nearer coming and what to the more remote one. As he saw them, they had more points in common than we are wont to notice. The nearer one had bearings of great moment to his hearers, far greater than they can have to us. And we are slow to realize the importance of that verification of the fact of a final judgment which Jesus saw in the nearer judgment upon Jerusalem. Yet further, it is plain throughout this discourse that Jesus thought much of the immediate practical results, and hence dwelt very largely on the dangers to which his disciples would be exposed ; warned them against being deceived, etc.

These considerations serve to account for the manner in which the various parts of this discourse are presented. At first view they may not seem to afford much aid in its interpretation. A deeper view, however, will suggest that

when we have really reached the mind and purpose of the speaker, we have all the clew we ever can have to the interpretation of his words. As we approximate toward his real thought and see how the subject lay before his mind, we approach also the true stand-point from which to see things as he saw them, which is essentially to see his real meaning.

The exposition of Mark xxiv. 19-36 in its connection must be admitted to be very difficult. The fact that the general drift, not to say the strong current, of the discourse throughout this chapter refers to the nearer coming, draws us to interpret these verses of this coming, if the scriptural usage of its phrases will readily admit. On the supposition that Christ here alludes also to his final coming, the point of chief difficulty is to comprehend how a mind holds before its view two distinct comings, and speaks of them both, either in the same words or by sudden and untraceable transition from one to the other. The points above suggested may help us to conceive how, to a limited extent, this might occur in this discourse with no violation of the known laws of mind. The doctrine of a "double sense" in prophecy has been strained badly, and put to a vast amount of unnecessary and therefore unreasonable service. I refer to this fact now, to beseech that what I have just said may not be wrested to the support of its abuses.

I pass to other texts which speak of the coming of the Son of Man. Luke xvii. 20-37 must refer to the nearer coming. Occasioned by the question of the Pharisees as to the time "when the kingdom of God should come," it pays little regard to this precise point of their question, but deals far more with the *manner* of that coming, and the fearfully solemn issues it will involve. The kingdom of God, Jesus replies, does not come in a way to be seen at all by the cavilling and capitious. [The Greek word for "observation" — "cometh not with observation" — is constantly used by Luke in its verbal form for the artful, malign espionage with which they "watched" Jesus. See Luke vi. 7; xiv. 1; xx. 20]. Indeed this kingdom is already *among* you, and ye know

it not. But as to the time of this coming, vs. 22 implies that it will be within the personal life of some at least of those whom he addresses. Verse 25 says that Jesus must first suffer many things, and be rejected of that generation, which implies that the coming in question follows not long after his death, and that this death precedes it as a moral cause precedes its retributive results. Verses 31, 34-36 all imply that the sweep of this destruction will leave some to escape; a fact which utterly forbids its reference to Christ's final coming.

The passage (Luke xviii. 8): "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" seems also to refer to the nearer rather than the remoter coming; for the word for "earth" most often means only *the land*, i.e. of Palestine. The general sense seems to be that, despite of the richness of promise and the fulness of love which ought to inspire faith everywhere, yet the Son of Man, coming to bring retribution on the apostate Jewish people, will scarcely find any faith there. The immediate moral force of the remark upon his hearers is much greater applied to the nearer coming than to the more remote one.

John (xxi. 21-23) gives us words that passed between our Lord and Peter relative to John's death. Peter inquired, Lord, what of this man (John); what about his death? To which Jesus replied: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" From this a saying went abroad that John would not die, based on the assumption that the *coming of Christ* referred to was his final one, for the general resurrection. But John sets aside this interpretation, and with it the assumption on which it rested, throwing us back therefore upon Christ's nearer coming as the one referred to. Such was the fact. John lived till after Christ came to destroy the Jewish city and temple.

When the high-priest said to Jesus: "I adjure thee by the living God, tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God" (Matt. xxvi. 63, 64 and Mark xiv. 61, 62), he replied: "Thou hast said; and hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man

sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." It seems most appropriate to refer these words of Jesus to that highest possible proof of his being the Son of God — the glory of his final coming to judge the world. It is indeed true that his anterior coming in judgment on Jerusalem was to be a scene of horrors to the Jewish nation, a scene, moreover, which some of that very council and some of his murderers might live to witness; and withal a fiery precursor, pledge, and illustration of his far more august appearing for the judgment of all the race. Perhaps, therefore, we may suppose that this nearer coming was not altogether absent from his thought, and that his language was chosen for the purpose of suggesting it, similar words having been used by him with primary reference to this nearer coming. Yet the main reference seems to be to the last and most sublime demonstration of his Sonship and glory as Moral Governor, not of our race only, but of the moral universe.

That magnificent and august scene, given by Matthew only (xxv. 31-46), will be admitted by all candid interpreters to refer exclusively to the final judgment. "He shall come in his glory," supreme, unsurpassed; "all the holy angels" (not a few of them only) are with him: "then shall he sit" as sole King of the universe "upon the throne of his glory"; "before him shall be gathered," not Jews alone, not the representatives of their once sacred but also once desecrated city, but "all nations"; and then the grand and final separation, the righteous from the wicked, shall take place, and the final award of bliss or woe be passed upon them, never to be abated, reversed, or brought to an end. Surely these salient and chief points in the description suffice to show that this judgment is not partial, but universal; is not a foregoing type but itself the grand consummation.

Analogous to this in their exclusive reference to the final coming are the passages Matt. xiii. 41, 49, the two parables, the tares of the field, and the fishes of the net. Here

“the harvest is the end of the world,” “the reapers are the angels,” and “as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world.” And so, also, in the parable of the net: “So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” There is no shade of thought throughout these entire descriptions which suggests anything whatever save the scenes and results of the last judgment.

One more passage (Acts i. 11) must have exclusive reference to this final coming — the words of the “two men in white apparel” (angels) to the disciples, who had just seen their Lord ascending, till “a cloud received him out of their sight. . . . This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” In the same manner — personally, visibly, gloriously — so shall he come once more, and then every eye shall see him. No antecedent coming can be in all points, nor even in its main points, like this. This one grand appearing must far eclipse all its precursors, all its foregoing exemplifications — the august appearing of the Son of Man in his supreme glory.

Thus far we have found one class of passages in which Jesus speaks of his coming with well-defined and exclusive reference to his providential judgments on Jerusalem and its temple; another class, having exclusive reference to the final judgment; and yet another, in which it is at least supposable that both these comings were present to his mind, and that he either covered them both in the same utterance, or passed by most rapid transition from the one to the other.

It remains to inquire whether there is not also another class, in which Christ “comes” in the ministry of death, the personal death of every individual saint, to call him away to his home and reward in heavenly mansions. Precisely this construction must be given to Christ’s words: “In my

Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself" (John xiv. 2, 3). This coming we cannot suppose to be his visitation of judgment on Jerusalem; nor can we postpone it to his final appearing for the general resurrection and judgment. From the latter construction we are quite precluded by Christ's words to the penitent thief: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise"; and equally, also, by Paul's confident expectation that to "depart" is to "be with Christ" (Phil. i. 23); that being "absent from the body" is being "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 8). It is, therefore, altogether certain that Jesus did use this phrase, "come again," with reference to his coming in the ministry of death to take his people from earth to heaven.

Another passage seems to demand the same construction, viz. Luke xii. 35-45: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps trimmed and burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when he shall return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately," etc. Here the supposed case involves a *coming* home of their lord, analogous to which Jesus, in his practical application, says: "Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not." What *coming* is this? Precisely this question arose in the mind of Peter: "Then Peter said unto him: Lord, speakest thou this parable to us, or even to all?" Is this coming a special, local one, and is the admonition therefore applicable only to those few servants who may be on the earth when thou shalt come to destroy Jerusalem, or when thou shalt come to raise all the dead for the final judgment? Or, on the other hand, does it apply equally to all thy children in every age through all time? Our Lord's answer gives it the widest possible application, and therefore interprets this to be his coming to all his people in their personal death. In its spirit the admonition is pertinent to any other coming of Jesus to his people, e.g. in providential affliction, or in any extraordinary manifestation of his pres-

ence ; but the primary reference, looking so obviously to their final reward, must be to natural death.

This remarkable diversity in our Lord's usage, when speaking of his then future "comings," is certainly worthy of our very careful attention. We shall refer to it again when we pass to consider what the apostles say and mean as to Christ's coming and the end of the world "near at hand." But before we pass from the teachings of Christ in regard to his final coming, some other points should be distinctly noted. 1. He rigorously refrains from giving any definite date for this final coming. He says nothing about the year of our Lord in which it shall occur. He omits all allusion to the number of centuries or ages which must first pass away. It does not appear that he gave any clew to the immediate precursors or foregoing signs of that coming. All that he says (*Matt. xxiv.*, or elsewhere) of precursors or premonitory signs refers manifestly to the nearer coming, and not to the remote, final one. Inasmuch as those signs were certainly fulfilled in the nearer one, it is superfluous, and therefore unauthorized, to apply them to the more remote coming. Indeed, if we accept (as we must) the obvious sense of his words as recorded by *Mark (xiii. 32)*, the precise day of his final coming was not known even to himself, but to the Father only. To this very limitation Jesus may have alluded in these words at the point of his ascension: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power" (*Acts i. 7*; in the Greek, placed under his own control, reserved as his special prerogative). All the speculations of men, therefore, for fixing the precise day of the Lord's final coming, or even the age, are in the last degree unfounded and presumptuous. 2. But Jesus did give his disciples some very decisive intimations of the work of the gospel age, not as to its nature only, but its extent also—the success to be achieved in the diffusion of the gospel before the end should come. (*a*) In two parables he signified not only the rapid growth of gospel influence, but the ultimate greatness and completeness of its achievements.

“Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? It is like a grain of mustard-seed, which, when sown in the earth, is less than the least of all the seeds that be in the earth; but when sown it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it” (Mark iv. 30–32). Or, again, “It is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Matt. xiii. 33). Of these parables the true intent and the real wealth of their meaning may be suggested by the question: What more could the leaven do? What more could be put into the symbol of a mustard-seed? The leaven permeated the entire mass, “till the whole was leavened,” just as the evangelical prophet had long before said: “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. xi. 9). The mustard-seed, from being least of all in its seed, became in its fully developed glory the greatest of all the growths of the garden, complete, magnificent, everything you could expect a garden-seed to become. These parables are strikingly significant of the great results which Jesus saw in what was then only the tiny germ of the gospel kingdom of God. (b) Although, for good reasons, Jesus gave his ministerial life to labors for the lost sheep of Israel, and although the time had not really come to say much, in the face of Jewish prejudice, of the “other sheep not of that fold,” yet he did very definitely say: “I have [such] other sheep, not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold [of both Jews and Gentiles] and one Shepherd” (John x. 16), the common Redeemer of them all. (c) But when the time came to transfer from himself to his apostles not the planning, nor the supervising care, but the execution of this gospel work, and therefore the proper time to give them the true idea of its destined range and results, what did he say? As reported by Matthew (xxviii. 19): “Go ye, *disciple all the nations*,” nothing less — all the nations of the wide earth; or, as written by Mark

(xvi. 15): "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." If any question should arise as to time-limitations of this work of the gospel age, he answers it in the most practical and comforting way possible, saying: "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Your work is before you, to last as long as the world stands — the work of all my faithful servants, till I shall come, and the world shall end. Geographically, my plan grasps all the earth; historically, all the ages to the end of time. What more could it do? Certainly this was laying out large work — work so vast and so far-reaching in both space and time that it would seem no intelligent disciple could have thought of its being finished within the life of a few generations, much less, within their own. (*d*) But finally, something ought to be learned from the manner in which Jesus taught his people to pray for the complete success and the absolute sway of his gospel kingdom among men. To see this subject in its proper light, and this argument in its legitimate force, we may remember how much Jesus labored to impress this great truth: "Ask, and *it shall be given you*" (Luke xi. 9). "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John xiv. 14); and how he seems to have wrought the desired impression into the soul of at least his beloved John, who said: "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John v. 14).

Now let the question be: how much does Jesus authorize us to pray for in regard to his gospel kingdom? It is given both by Matthew and Luke essentially thus: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Luke teaches us that these words had scarcely passed the Saviour's lips when he added, "Ask, and it shall be given you"; as if he would say: this prayer, in all its breadth and richness, asks not too much for God to give; for verily I say unto you, ask for even all this, as you would beg bread of a friend at midnight to meet the calls of hospitality; "*and it shall be given you.*" *How* is the will of God done in

heaven? In filial love; with all the heart; by all the people. Shall we believe that Christ's gospel reign on earth will ever reach this standard in purity and in extent? Bearing on this point we have (a) the definiteness of the promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you," put in the closest connection with this prayer. (b) In point of largeness and fulness, these petitions in the Lord's prayer correspond precisely to the ancient prophecies: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. xi. 9); "Thy people shall be all righteous" (Isa. lx. 21); "I will put my law in their inward part, and write it in their heart; I will be their God, and they shall be my people; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," etc. (Jer. xxxi. 33, 34). These sayings are not the *guesses* of men, but the prophetic words of God; and hence they give us not the hopes or the calculations of the old prophets as to the geographical extension of the gospel and the sway of its moral power in the future ages of our world, but the very purpose and plan of the great God. (c) It ought to be accepted as an axiom, a ground principle in God's spiritual administration, that he never requires his people to pray for what he cannot give, and does not intend to give; for if he were to do this, and his people to know it, how could he expect to "find faith on the earth"? The things for which he requires us to pray stand therefore alongside of his prophetic words, revelations of his eternal plan in regard to the extension and success of his gospel kingdom. Jesus did authorize his disciples to grasp the conquest of the world in their faith and positive expectation, and in their sphere of Christian labor to bring it back to God. As this must be accomplished instrumentally by preaching the gospel to every creature with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, they must have seen before them and their successors onward through the ages a vast work to be achieved before the end should truly come.

THE PHRASEOLOGY OF THE APOSTLES IN SPEAKING OF
THIS SUBJECT.

From what Christ *taught*, we pass to what his apostles *thought*. It is surely reasonable to expect a definite correlation between his teachings and their creed. Of his unrecorded sayings, which were many (John xiv. 26; xx. 30; xxi. 25), we can take no account, nor do we need them for our present purpose. The sayings that are recorded are precisely those which made most impression on the minds of the disciples. It is manifestly safe to assume that these recorded words did make a substantial impression on their minds before they were written. After they had passed into the writings recognized as inspired, they would naturally hold and even increase their power over the current thought of the apostles and of the churches. As to their means of interpreting Christ's words correctly, it must be seen that they had, at least in some respects, the advantage over us, inasmuch as they had the attendant circumstances for the most part before them; could ask all the explanations they chose; opportunities which, as they have told us, they often improved.

We come now to the main question. What were the views of the apostles, and what the true sense of their words, in regard to the *time* of Christ's final coming? We have before our minds this special inquiry: Did they believe that *in fact* this coming was then near at hand in the sense of being probably, or even possibly, to occur within their own lifetime? Were they under this great mistake as to the actual fact? Did they think that the work of the gospel age was so nearly finished that they might look for Christ's final coming and the end of the world within one year or five or fifty? Obviously if they held this view as a point of intellectual judgment and belief, they were greatly mistaken. Are we holden by the laws of interpretation to give their words a sense which convicts them of this mistake? These questions we shall have continually in view in our consideration of their words.

All thoughtful minds will see that our construction of their words should be governed by considerations drawn from the following sources: (1) The words themselves which they use as to the time of this final coming and the end of the world. (2) Whatever qualifying, modifying expressions they may have used to define more precisely the sense of their words. (3) What they report to us as said to them by Jesus Christ on this subject. (4) What they themselves say as to the work of the gospel age, the extent of it, and therefore the time it must demand. (5) We must not fail to take into account that law of mind under which future events are made to seem very near by virtue not of their nearness in time, but of their vastness, their impressiveness, their momentous relations to our present and eternal life.

It will facilitate our examination to arrange our passages into groups: e.g. thus:

I. Those which speak of "the last time"; "last days"; "the end of the worlds" [ages].

II. Those which present the apostles and early Christians as *waiting, anticipating, ardently expecting* the coming of Christ.

III. Those which may be understood to say or imply that the present Christian life continues *until* the Lord comes.

IV. Those in which they speak of his coming and of the end of the world as *near*.

I. Those which speak of "the last time"; "last days"; "the end of the world."

In this group I place the following: Heb. i. 2, "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."

1 Pet. i. 20, "Christ was manifest in these last times for you."

Acts ii. 17: "It shall come to pass *in the last days*, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit."

1 John ii. 18: "It is the last time [Greek, hour]; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists, whereby we know it is the last time."

1 Tim. iv. 1: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith."

2 Tim. iii. 1: "This know that *in the last days* perilous times shall come."

Jude 17, 18: "Remember the words spoken before by the apostles how they told you there should be mockers *in the last time.*"

2 Pet. iii. 3, 4: "Knowing this, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

1 Cor. x. 11: "These things are written for our admonition, *upon whom the ends of the world* are come."

Heb. ix. 26: "Now once in the end of the world hath he [Christ] appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

In this group we have a very considerable variety of terms and phrases, yet all of substantially equivalent sense; "the last of the days"; "these last times"; "the last hour [time]"; "the latter time"; "the end of the world" [age], etc. etc. This variety of phrase shows that whatever the sense may be it was not stereotyped into any single word or phrase, but was *held as an idea*, capable, therefore, of being put in various forms. But for the special end we have in view it is far more to our purpose to note that this group becomes its own interpreter; for, beyond all question, this "last time," "last hour," these "latter days," had even then *already come*. God had already "spoken by his Son"; Jesus had already been "manifested in the flesh"; the effusions of the Spirit promised in "these last days" through the prophet Joel began even at the great Pentecost: the "many antichrists," often predicted as to come "in the last days" were already there when John wrote his first epistle and Paul his to Timothy. The people for whom, according to Paul to the Corinthians, the lessons in the Pentateuch were written, and upon whom the ends of the worlds [ages] had come, were the very men of that genera-

tion to whom he was writing. The point of time when Christ offered himself once, defined as being "in the end of the worlds [ages], had certainly passed. Consequently the apostles must have spoken *of their own times* as being the last or latter time, as the end or point of junction of the ages, i.e. the point where the former age of the world ended and the latter age begun. Therefore this phraseology fails to give us any light whatever as to their views of the *length* of this latter age of the world. They simply spoke of the time then present in its relation to the ages of the past as "*these latter days*." We, of this nineteenth century, might use the same phraseology of our times as related to the six thousand years since the creation, and yet imply nothing whatever as to our views of the period yet to intervene before the world shall end. We may therefore set aside this entire group of passages as irrelevant to our main question, for they give us not the least light on the point whether the apostles did or did not believe the final coming of Christ to be near in time. It is important to notice these passages because, to the superficial reader, they often seem to be strong, if not decisive, proof that the apostles thought their own times close upon the end of the world.

II. A second group of passages speak of "waiting for," expecting, fondly and earnestly anticipating, Christ's final coming. The following are examples:

1 Cor. i. 7, 8: "So that ye come behind in no gift, *waiting for the coming* of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Thess. i. 9, 10: "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and *to wait for his Son from heaven*, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus; who delivered us from the wrath to come."

Tit. ii. 12, 13: Teaching us that we should live righteously in this present world, *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*"

2 Tim. iv. 8: "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them also *that love his appearing.*"

Phil. iii. 20, 21: "Our citizenship [Greek] is in heaven; from whence also we *look for the Saviour*, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

2 Pet. iii. 11, 12: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; *looking for and hasting unto* [eagerly awaiting] the coming of the day of God," etc.

Carefully studying this group of passages the reader will notice: (1) That this earnest looking to Christ's coming is regarded as one of the prominent tests of Christian character, a special characteristic of true converts to Christ. (2) That the reason why it is so is not, apparently, because that coming was thought of as near in point of time, but because it was practically so vital to the Christian life. *The Lord Jesus Christ was the very soul of primitive Christianity.* All its grand points made him their centre. Jesus Christ, the Son of God; appearing in human flesh; bearing the sins of men on his cross to deliver them from its curse; rising from the dead; ascending to the highest heavens, and seated on the throne of the universe; *coming again in like manner as he went* — then to "change our vile body" and consummate our future glory in the eternal blessedness of heaven: these were the grand themes of their gospel. Converted men were converted to these views, or rather, by their conversion their eyes were turned and fixed upon these great facts pertaining to their risen Saviour. (3) Yet more, if possible, to our purpose is the further fact, that the glorious final coming of Christ, and the blessedness of which it would be the consummation to all his people, were thought of as the great motive-power of the gospel. There lay embosomed the Christian's final and complete reward. Upon this it was felt that men's eyes must be fixed, to make them strong against the fierce

and fiery temptations of that age. Hence it must be kept in their view, pressing evermore with living force upon their souls. Let them learn to love and long for this appearing. No matter whether as to time it were near or remote. To the point of its moral force on the Christian life, its place in time is "nothing; itself — Christ seen again in his glory, and transforming his people into like glory — is everything.

(4) Let it also be duly considered; this looking to the final coming of Christ, this warm and longing anticipation of it, was a thing, not of the cold intellect, but of the living heart. The blessing is for those who "love his appearing." It involved no speculations as to the time when, but simply dwelt on the great fact as being sure, as most precious, a thing to be awaited with fervid hope and blest anticipation.

(5) It is in place here to suggest that this looking for, this eagerly awaiting Christ's final coming, is what we might reasonably expect from men who had lived with him personally in the flesh, who saw him ascend into the heavens, and who heard with their own ears those words never to be forgotten: "Shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go." They remembered those oft-repeated words, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Words more fraught with the tenderness and sympathy of love never fell from human lips. Is it strange that such words should have sunk deep into their aching hearts, and should have been cherished through all their future years, throwing a depth of interest into that promise of his coming which we can at best but faintly conceive? The power of the heart would make such a promised coming *seem near*, whatever their real belief might be as to its actual relations to time

(6) It is supposable that in their current thought the glory of the saints at and after Christ's second coming would so greatly surpass the glory of the intermediate state (between death and the resurrection) that their minds rested mainly on the former as the consummation of their hopes — the fullness and perfection of their anticipated heaven. This looking at Christ's final coming as if it opened the future heaven,

and were almost identical with it, may have been due in part to their personal relations to Jesus, and in part to the actual pre-eminence of the post-resurrection state above the intermediate. Yet it is certain that, relatively to the present life, Paul longed intensely for that heavenly state and that "being with Christ" to which death would instantly introduce him. Nothing less than this lies in his words to the Philippians (i. 21-23): "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . . For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Compare also 2 Cor. v. 8.) Their usual modes of thought and expression, however, associate the heavenly state with Christ's second coming. Under the special circumstances of the apostles this need not surprise us, nor does it prove that they really regarded this final coming as near in time.

These various considerations sufficiently account for the words and the thought in this group of texts, their earnest looking, and ardent longing for Christ's promised coming, without at all involving the doctrinal belief that this coming was actually close at hand.

III. I put into a third group certain passages which may seem to imply that the Christian life of then living saints was to *continue* until Christ's final coming, and consequently that the apostles thought this coming actually near in point of time.

Thus, in 1 Thess. v. 23, Paul prays that the brethren "may be preserved blameless *unto the coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ." The original words here are *in* the coming (*ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ*); that is, may be accounted and rewarded as blameless ones *when* that day shall open. The same words are used 1 Thess. iii. 13; "To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God *at* (or *in*) the coming of our Lord with all his saints." But stronger language appears in Paul to Timothy (1st Ep. vi. 14): "I charge thee keep this commandment, unrebukable *until* the appearing of our Lord." And to the Philippians (i. 6);

“ Confident that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it *until* the day of Christ”; and (i. 10) “ that ye may be sincere and without offence *until* the day of Christ.” But in this last passage, the original (*εις ημεραν*) strictly means *against* the day; i.e. sincere and without offence, so as to be in readiness for the day, and fully prepared to meet it, accepted of God and joyful of heart, whenever it shall come.

To the point now in hand the question on these passages is this: Did Paul assume that Timothy’s responsible charge of that “ commandment ” would continue with no interruption from death even till Christ’s appearing? And that the Philippians would need the good work of preserving grace wrought in them continuously even unto the day of Christ’s final coming? And did Paul assume that not one of the Philippian converts would die before the final day of Christ? Was this “ day ” in his view so very near as this; so that we must say he used these words because he saw the end of time so very near? If so, Paul was under a very great misapprehension as to the time of Christ’s final coming. Before we impute to him so grave an error of opinion, let us ask if his words demand this construction.

In his charge to Timothy, may he not have meant simply, with your eye on that final appearing; with your soul impressed by all its solemnities, never forgetting how momentous its issues will be; that you are preaching for him who will surely come again in his glory, with a crown of life for all his faithful servants? This practical sense of that appearing is quite a distinct thing from the definite belief that it was to occur actually during their lifetime, and seems to us to account adequately for the language he uses.

On this passage Ellicott very cautiously remarks: “ It may perhaps be admitted that the sacred writers have used language in reference to the Lord’s return which seems to show that the longings of hope had *almost* become the convictions of belief; yet it must also be observed that (as in the present case) this language is often qualified by expressions which show that they also felt and knew that that hour

was not to be looked for immediately (2 Thess. ii. 2), but the counsels of God, yea, and the machinations of Satan, must require time for their fulfilment" (p. 110). The same points must be made upon Paul's words to the Philippians (i. 6). It is one thing to introduce the day of Christ here as the precise *terminus* of God's sanctifying work, the point to which it must be continued, and then and there be superseded by Christ's second coming; and quite another thing to introduce it as the *goal* of their Christian life, the consummation of their hopes, the reward of their conflicts and labors—the all-inspiring motive, therefore, that should lift them above every temptation and make them steadfast. The latter view is surely admissible, and is obviously in harmony with the current strain of apostolic teaching. On this passage Ellicott remarks judiciously: "It may be fairly said that Paul uses language here which has not so much a mere historic as a general and practical reference. The day of Christ, whether far off or near, is the decisive day to every individual: it is practically coincident with the day of his death," etc.

The passages which should be translated, not "until," but *against* (Phil. i. 10) or *in* (1 Thess. v. 23; iii. 13), present no particular difficulty. Let it be your prayer and your watchful concern to be accepted of Christ *on* that great day. See that ye live every day in readiness for that great day of days. But a more full view of the reasons which demand this construction of these passages, rather than that which would assume that the apostles believed Christ's coming, in fact, near, will be given under our next group of texts.

IV. Lastly, we have a group of texts which affirm, in various phrase, that "the Lord," or his "coming," or "the day," or "the Judge," or "the end of all things" is near at hand.

We propose (1) To cite these passages; (2) To adduce some reasons which forbid that construction of them which would imply that the apostles really believed the final com-

ing of Christ to be near *in time*; (8) To append some special comments upon these several texts.

1. Peter (1st Ep. iv. 7) uses this very strong language: "But the end of all things is at hand: Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." Paul (Phil. iv. 5): "Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand." Again, (Rom. xiii. 11, 12): "And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent; the day is at hand." Also, (1 Cor. iv. 5): "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God." Yet further (1 Thess. iv. 15, 17; v. 1, 2, 4,): "We who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. . . . The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds," etc. . . . "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. . . . But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief," etc. With this should be compared (2 Thess. ii. 1-3): "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind or troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there be a falling away first," etc. Several passages of the same general character appear in the Revelation of John (e.g. i. 7; iii. 11; xxii. 7, 12): "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him," etc. "Behold I come quickly; blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." "My reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be." Also (Heb. x. 25, 36, 37):

“Exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” . . . “Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” The apostle James (v. 7) thus: “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” “Stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned. Behold the Judge standeth before the door.” Peter, again (2d Ep. iii. 3-12): “There shall come scoffers, saying, Where is the promise of his coming”? “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,” etc. . . . “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God,” etc.

2. The main question before us being this: Do these passages by a fair, legitimate construction imply that the writers believed the final coming of Christ to be then very near *in time*, it is appropriate that certain considerations of a general nature, bearing vitally upon this point, should be brought definitely before us at this stage of our investigation. It may be freely admitted that much of the language just quoted would bear the affirmative construction if there were no opposing considerations. But there are; and it behooves us to give them our attention.

(1) Peter met the scoffers of his age with a reply which manifestly provides for a very long delay of Christ's final coming. They said: “Where is the promise” of that coming which you have continually said was very near? For all things continue still as they were. To this Peter does not reply: “It *is*, nevertheless, very near, and you will soon find it to be so”; but he says the promise of his coming is nevertheless sure, though a thousand years should intervene. This reply is simply unaccountable, if Peter really believed

that the Lord's coming was to occur within a few years; for if this had been the fact, such a reply would have misled those scoffers, perhaps fatally; and if Peter had expected it to become the fact, how can we avoid the conclusion that he meant to mislead them, giving them reason to think that a delay of a thousand years or more was at least supposable? His object was manifestly to impress the certainty, but not the nearness in time, of that august event.

(2) In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he speaks as if himself and those to whom he wrote might remain on earth living till Christ's final coming, and then, with no intervening death, be taken up to meet the Lord in the air. He also, in the next chapter, speaks of the Lord's coming "as a thief in the night" — language which, coupled with what precedes, might imply that this event might, and probably would, break upon them suddenly at no distant day. Now, observe that the Thessalonian brethren understood him in precisely this sense, and were greatly agitated — "shaken in mind and troubled" — by his letter. He hastens to write them again, to deny this construction. He protests that they misunderstood his meaning. He assures them that great events, occupying, as the passage is commonly interpreted, many centuries, must intervene. Now, the point we make here is, that this disclaimer squarely, peremptorily, forbids their construction of Paul's words. For Paul himself testifies positively that he never meant to say or imply that the final coming of Christ was in point of time near at hand. And, even more, he testifies that it is *not* near in time. It is fortunate for us that this sense was put upon Paul's words during his life, since it gave him an opportunity to disclaim it utterly, as we see that he did. What stronger evidence could we possibly have that he never meant to give it as his belief that Christ's coming was near in time? Olshausen holds that Paul changed his mind between the writing of his first Epistle and his second; having been under a mistake at the writing of the first, but having become aware of his error and renounced it and

embraced the truth before the writing of the second letter — a theory which we might believe if Paul had definitely said so, but not otherwise. If Paul had confessed his previous mistake, and expressed becoming gratitude for the new light that had dawned upon his mind, it would be reasonable to accept Olshausen's theory. But this is far enough from being what he said. Obviously, he used the first person plural ("we who are alive and remain," etc.) as a convenient way of distinguishing the two great classes of saints at the moment of Christ's second coming, viz. the previously dead, and the living who had not tasted death. This distinction needed then to be made strongly, because the Thessalonians were in distress under the apprehension that the dead class would be at a great disadvantage in that eventful hour. This feeling of theirs Paul meets strongly, thus: Even if that glorious coming were to break upon us to-day, "the dead in Christ would rise first," before we, the living, should ascend to meet the Lord, and would therefore be at no disadvantage whatever compared with us. So, "comfort ye one another with these words."

(3) Paul had prophetic views of the work and results of the gospel age, of which he "would not have his brethren ignorant" (Rom. xi. 25, 26), which included the "coming in of the fulness" [the main body] of the Gentile world, and then "all Israel" would be saved besides — results which he certainly knew had not been realized then, and could not be for ages. As surely as the divine plan included these results in the gospel age of the world, so surely the end could not be yet. As surely as Paul saw these results by the spirit of prophecy, and would not have his brethren ignorant of them, so surely he could not have believed that the end of the world was in fact near, and with equal certainty he never intended to teach this doctrine and enforce it upon others.

(4) As we have seen already, Jesus had given all his disciples views scarcely less definite than those of the far-reaching plans of God for the extension and the complete

success of the gospel, bidding them pray that the will of God might be done on earth as in heaven, and commanding them to go and disciple all the nations for this result; assuring them, moreover, that his gospel in the world, like leaven in meal, would work till the mass was leavened. It is legitimate for us to assume that these cardinal features in his system, these truths so inspiring to their apostolic labors, were not among the last things to be brought to their remembrance and impressed into their very souls by "the Comforter," taking the things of Christ, and setting them in sunlight before their minds. Hence we must assume not only the theoretic knowledge of these great future triumphs of the gospel, but a living, practical impression thereof, of such sort as must inevitably shut off the idea that the end of this gospel age was in point of time actually near at hand.

(5) Let it be noted further that Jesus said to them, most explicitly and strongly, ye cannot know the time of that final coming. This knowledge is not for you. The Father reserves it to himself alone. These declarations should have barred off all definite estimate or theories as to the actual time. It may be presumed that they had this effect.

(6) Jesus had spoken of one future coming that was in fact near (within that generation); and had blended with this another coming, more remote, for the final resurrection and judgment of all the race. Is it strange that his manner of speaking of these future comings should reappear in the writings of his apostles? Might not they as well as he think of the former coming as both an illustration and a prelude and pledge of the latter one? If so, this law of construction may serve to explain some of the passages now before us.

(7) It is certainly supposable that as Jesus in a few passages refers to his coming to his people in the ministry of death,— a coming which was in fact near,— so the apostles may in some cases use his phraseology in the same sense.

(8) Finally we may take into account a well-known and

vastly important law of mind by which things seem to us near or remote by virtue, not of their supposed nearness in time, but of their momentous relations and of their solemn interest. Who does not know that we practically think of the eternal world as near or afar in time according as we do or do not take home to our heart the vastness of its issues and their most vital bearings upon our personal well-being? Many a sinner under pungent conviction of guilt, has really felt that hell itself was opening that instant beneath his very feet! He does not care to estimate the intervening time; he does not look at the matter in that way. Guilt and doom are so impressively connected, they seem to him almost the same thing, and guilt being awfully present he cannot but feel that doom is close upon him. The same law applies to the joyous experiences of God's children. The soul may be so fully bathed in the atmosphere of the Saviour's presence that it becomes quite unnatural and scarcely possible to conceive of him as far away. Continuous and impressive thought upon the glory of his second coming makes that coming seem sweetly near, not because it is believed to be near in time, but because the solemnity, the glory, the impressiveness of the scene have thoroughly taken possession of the heart. We may call this the *practical*, as distinguished from the purely *theoretical*, conception; the witness of the heart, and not the chronological calculation of the head. Now the apostles were of all men most sure to have these heart-conceptions of the Saviour's final coming. Had not they seen him rising bodily from earth toward heaven, till a cloud of glory enfolded and bore him from their view? And could they ever forget those words: "Ye shall yet see him come as ye have seen him go," only with glory and majesty far more grand and sublime? They were the men of all the race to cherish these words with tenderest remembrance, and to think of that final coming as near, not because they estimated it to be so in actual time, but because it lay so impressively and sweetly near to their heart. This law of our sentient nature should, therefore, have its due place and

power in our interpretation of what they said in respect to the final coming of their Lord.

3. We are now to bring under special review the several passages in the group before us.

The words of Peter "The end of all things is at hand" (1st Ep. iv. 7), we incline to refer to Christ's final coming and to the real end of this state of probation, and the more so because the context speaks of "him who holds himself in readiness to judge the living and the dead" (vs. 5). It is indeed, possible that his full meaning would be given by this limitation: "The end of all things *as to yourselves*, for death will soon shut you off utterly from all that pertains to this earthly life." But though I regard this as possibly his thought, yet I deem it altogether probable that his mind was upon the final coming. Assuming this, I account for his words on the principle last above presented, viz. that the end of all things was practically and in thought and realization *near*, not because he believed it to be so in point of time, but because it lay so solemnly and impressively upon his soul. He lived in the atmosphere of that glorious coming. He breathed the very life of that momentous truth. It was to him as a present reality. Its issues seemed too vast, momentous, pressing, to admit of its being thought of as remote. Yet that Peter did not believe Christ's final coming to be actually near *in time* is quite apparent from the manner of his reply to the scoffers; i.e. not by affirming that this coming was surely near in time, but (*a*) by calling their attention to the case of the deluge; and (*b*) by saying that a thousand years' delay would no more affect its certainty than one day's delay; which manifestly indicates that a delay of one thousand or even of several thousand years is supposable.

In the words of Paul (Phil. iv. 5), "The Lord is at hand," it may be questioned whether he thinks of nearness in time or of omnipresence in space; the former being supported by the repeated use of the kindred verb (*ἐγγίζω* from *ἐγγύς*), in the sense of nearness in time, and the latter by the following

context: "Be careful for nothing, but in everything let your requests be made known unto God," ever near to help. On this point critics differ, most of them favoring the reference to time and to the coming of the Lord Jesus. Yielding this, the passage comes under the same law as the last cited. Paul, no less than Peter, had a most impressive sense of that momentous coming, and held it near his heart in the same practical way.

In the passage (Rom. xiii. 11, 12), "Now is our salvation nearer," etc., some insist that this "salvation" is precisely the Saviour himself, coming in his personal and final glory. If this be its meaning, Paul must have deemed it very near in time, for this is a measurement on the scale of the human, earthly life of the believers addressed, nearer now than at the point of their conversion. But I see no demand whatever for this construction. We have all that the words call for when we apply them to the heavenly state reached by every Christian at his personal death, which of course is brought nearer by each succeeding day. And this harmonizes with the drift of the apostle's argument. He is urging the duty of love, and at this point enforcing it by the twofold responsibility; (a) of the augmented light of this gospel age compared with the ignorance ("night") that preceded; (b) by the fact that they were rapidly nearing the consummation of their blessedness in the heavenly salvation, nearer now than when they first believed. He assumes that they are already in the "day" of gospel light; the night of the foregoing darkness is rapidly passing away. Let them live under a just sense of these blessings; let them bear worthily these responsibilities.

We pass to the words of Paul to the Corinthians (1st Ep. iv. 5): "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come," etc. The connection shows that this is the Lord's coming for the judgment of the race. To the point we have in hand the only question is, Do these words imply that Paul regarded this "coming" as near in time, i.e. within the life of those censorious brethren at Corinth, who were

presuming to sit in judgment on the great Apostle? Did he mean, "be a little patient, brethren, yet for a very short time, and the Lord will relieve you of this responsibility of judging your apostolic fathers"? Did he not rather mean to say: "Ye have put me on trial at your own bar; ye quite misapprehend your functions and responsibilities. I do not even judge myself: the Lord, he only is my Judge. I suggest, therefore, that ye judge nothing before his time; leave the responsibility to him; he will come full soon enough for your convenience; and, coming, he will bring to light all hidden things of darkness, and reveal the most secret purposes of selfish, ill-feeling hearts." Certainly here is pertinent meaning in abundance to his words without the least implication that he thought the time of that coming to be really near. Or thus: I would affirm that it matters nothing to the apostle's argument whether the time of the Lord's coming were then five years distant or five hundred thousand years; for it would be monstrous to suppose that Paul suspends the fitness and right of their sitting in judgment on himself upon the nearness or remoteness of the Lord's coming, tacitly admitting that if it were far distant, they might properly proceed to issue the case, while if it were very near, they might with propriety postpone action, and adjourn the case till his coming. No, indeed; he meant to suggest, in his own inimitable way, that no judge in the universe could fitly pass upon this case save Jesus Christ. Therefore it behooved them to judge nothing till he should come, be that coming when it might.

The related passages in Paul's two Epistles to the Thesalonians have been, perhaps, sufficiently argued already. Beyond all question Paul was understood to imply that the final coming of the Lord was near in time. Equally beyond question he disclaims this opinion, and therefore determines for us the main point we wish to reach, showing that he never meant to say that; did not believe it; but did believe that a long period must intervene before that final coming. It is of the smallest possible consequence whether this great

apostasy would postpone the Lord's coming one thousand years or ten thousand. In either case it is thrown far beyond any point which could, as to time, be legitimately expressed by the apostle in the words, "near at hand."

The passages in the Revelation of John (i. 7; iii. 11; xxii. 7, 12, 20) will be readily recalled. Their key-note is, "I come quickly." The manner of this coming is "with clouds," and seen by "every eye." The descriptive points in Rev. i. 7 identify this coming with that of Matt. xxiv. 30. The prophetic words in which Jesus depicted the impending doom of Jerusalem, at once hopelessly apostate, and persecuting the Lord of glory and his people unto death, are substantially reproduced in the first series of these apocalyptic visions, and constitute their burden. An extended and thorough comparison of these with those will show that both series of predictions treat of the same coming of the Lord Jesus, that which, at the date of John's writing, was, in fact, very near. It may be observed that his "coming quickly" is put in the closest connection of thought with the speedy fulfilment of these visions, thus (Rev. xxii. 6, 7): "The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold I come quickly." The fulfilling of these prophetic visions and the coming of Jesus are each done shortly: they are expressed in slightly diverse terms, but are the same thing. But this coming then, due quickly, is not the end of the world and the final judgment scene. The great facts revealed in Rev. xx. put at least a thousand years, really an immensely long, indefinite age, between this nearer coming and the final judgment.¹

The passages (Heb. x. 25, 36, 37) must be put in the same class with those in the Revelation. "Exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching," etc. This coming is actually close at hand. The suffering breth-

¹ The reader is respectfully referred to my recently published Notes on the Revelation of John for a much more extended discussion of these related prophecies of Jesus (as in Matt. xxiv.) and of John.

ren needed only patience, and it would come, i.e. while yet they lived. Let it be considered these were Jewish Christians. This epistle assumes that they were severely tried, persecuted almost unto blood (xii. 4). "The day approaching" would break the power of their persecutors, and bring the persecuted ones relief. The near coming of the Lord as related to the Jews of that age was most obviously that identical coming which Jesus himself put in the foreground, and which stands in like manner in the foreground throughout the Revelation of John, and, for the same reason, in this Epistle to the Hebrews.

We have yet another passage in the same class, that from James (v. 7-9): "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord," etc. It will be borne in mind that this apostle James was long the leading pastor of the church at Jerusalem, and that he addresses this letter to "the twelve tribes scattered abroad," i.e. to Jewish Christians. A still more definite identification of our passage with Christ's coming in judgment on Jerusalem is indicated in the context. Addressing the rich, oppressive, apostate portion of the Jews, his words are: "Ye have condemned and killed the *Just One*." The corresponding words of Peter are, "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just" (Acts iii. 12); and those of Stephen, "Ye have slain those who predicted the coming of the *Just One*, of whom ye have now been the betrayers and murderers" (Acts vii. 52). Usage, therefore, fully sustains the application of these words to Jesus considered as standing spotless before his malign accusers and by them condemned and murdered. So considered he was pre-eminently *the Just One*. Remarkably James makes a logical connection between the murder of this "Just One" and his speedy coming, i.e. for judgment on the guilty city and people who had invoked his blood upon the heads of themselves and of their children (Matt. xxvii. 25). "Ye have condemned and killed the Just One and he doth not" (i.e. doth not *yet*) "resist you." [But he will come in terrific judgments ere this generation shall pass]; "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the com-

ing of the Lord," "for this coming draweth nigh." Hence I find in these words a manifest allusion to the nearer coming of which Jesus himself speaks so often and so explicitly, and be it also considered, in this very same connection of thought.

Concerning the passage (2 Pet. iii. 3-12) two points, in addition to those already made, deserve attention. Peter not only provides for a very long delay in the time of the second coming, but indicates the reason for this remarkable long-suffering of the much-abused Moral Ruler of the world, viz. because he is "not willing [wishing, *βουλόμενος*] that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This waiting for sinners to repent is the genius and spirit of the gospel age. The Hebrew prophets first, and Jesus himself during his ministry, gave clear intimations of the extent to which this waiting must be carried, and of its purposed results. They said: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord" (Ps. xxii. 27); he said: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." For these results the long-suffering of God waited then, and the final coming of the Lord was delayed. Peter had these grand purposes of the gospel age before his mind, and therefore had sufficient data bearing on the time of this coming to decide readily that it was not then near in time. Some persons receive a vague impression that the time was supposed to be very near from the words: "Looking for and *hasting unto* the coming of the day of God." It seems to them that hurrying toward the event and laboring to shorten up the intervening time (which they accept as nearly or quite the apostle's meaning) must imply that it was supposed to be near in time, almost within sight. But Peter's words include no preposition corresponding to "unto." *Earnestly awaiting*, expresses fairly the sense of his words. It is rather the bringing of the heart into warm and fervid contact with that sublime, impressive, momentous truth than hasting ourselves toward it, or hasting its occurrence to bring it nearer to us. These last-named constructions, indeed, are not to be thought of.

CONCLUSION.

1. Some who assume that the apostles believed Christ's final coming to be even then near in time, would logically infer, that because they believed so then, we ought to believe so now. But if they held this positive belief as to the actual time of the final coming, they held one positive error; and shall it be insisted that because they held this error we ought to hold the same? Are Christian people asked to receive such logic as divine authority in reference to a point of duty? Yet further, whatever that coming of Christ was which the apostles affirmed to be actually near in time then, has long since passed, and those words cannot be used to prove that the next coming must also be near in time now. A point of time which was near to come eighteen hundred years ago cannot be, in the same chronological sense, near at hand now, for the good reason that it must have long since gone by. Those apostolic words, in their precise relations to *time*, cannot by any possibility apply to the present hour as they applied to present time when spoken eighteen centuries since. Let us not be misled by fallacies.

2. The doctrine has been put forth from influential quarters that because the apostles lived in constant waiting expectation that the Lord would come to judge the world soon, *therefore he must certainly come before the millenium*. I submit that this conclusion is based on no logical relations. For if their expectation fastened on a definite time near at hand, it was certainly without divine authority, was a mistake, and therefore, can prove nothing whatever in regard to the actual time of that second coming. If, as we have assumed and sought to show, it was a sort of expectation which simply *waited* and loved and longed for — a thing of the heart and not of intellectual time-computation, — then it would certainly admit not only of eighteen hundred years' delay (as it has already), but equally well of a thousand more, for a short millenium, or of indefinite thousands, for a long one. Our position is, that an inference *drawn ever so logically*

from a mistake is worthless. The inference now under consideration cannot be drawn from the true view, from the real nature, of the waiting expectation of the apostolic heart. As no time-relations entered into that waiting, so no inference in regard to *time* can be drawn out of it.

3. I trust it has been shown that the Christian mind of our age, not to say also the general public mind, may fitly relieve itself of all apprehensions that the apostles labored under any such error of belief as to the time of Christ's final coming as must damage their claims to inspiration or their credit for intelligent good sense as disciples at the feet of their Master. It certainly appears that their Master spake of his then future comings clearly, not confusedly; guardedly, not recklessly; most impressively, and never otherwise. That he should have spoken of one coming then near, and of another in the remote, undefined distance; the nearer one immensely vital to the men of his generation and to their children; inexpressively valuable, moreover, through all future generations as a development of the great principles of retribution, of the sublime idea of judgment for the sins of men; this should seem no strange thing to us; nor that he should put the remoter coming upon the great prophetic canvass so that its shadings should seem to come out from behind, or we might say, from under the nearer one, to be seen through its light, and to be illustrated from its example; this too is so far from being mysterious and inexplicable, that we may well account it a masterly policy, a thing of consummate wisdom. Now, to our present purpose let it be said, the apostles seem to have made no mistake in apprehending these prophetic fore-showings given them by their Master. They saw the nearer coming, and spake of it as their Lord had done before; they saw also the remoter coming, i.e. in its nature and relations; they saw it especially in its moral bearings of impressive, momentous interest; and for the sake of these bearings they brought it near and held it in close and living contact with their hearts. But it does not appear that they ventured to form any definite opinions

as to the *time*, — the century, the age, when this final advent should occur. They have given us no chronology on this subject. They have said nothing, therefore, which can compromise their credit as inspired men. On this point our minds may be comfortably at rest.

4. Finally, the way in which the apostles held their views of Christ's then future comings — the nearer one really near in time, and full of illustrative power; the remoter one, with the element of time eliminated, and therefore near only in the sense of being held close to the very heart, loved, longed for, appreciated proximately at its full and momentous value; this is truly a grand model of wisdom for us and for all the ages; the very consummation of practical good sense; a thing, therefore, to be studied diligently and wrought into our heart-experiences with unsparing assiduity. Success in this endeavor would make the now future coming a stupendous moral power upon the soul. It would save the Christian world from those sad effervescences and aberrations that are sure to come from admitting the element of time into our ideas of Christ's final coming. Let us be content with the divine economy: "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath reserved as his own prerogative." Leaving the *time when* in his sovereign disposal, let us hold the great fact of that future coming in perpetual nearness to our heart, a thing of certainty, a thing of stupendous issues, a thing of most vital bearings, a fact of unsurpassed majesty and glory.