

A  
DISCOURSE  
DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE  
SYNOD OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ELIZABETH, N. J.,

OCTOBER 16, 1866,

BY THE MODERATOR,  
THE REV. JOHN T. DUFFIELD, D. D.

WITH NOTES AND AN APPENDIX.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.



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To the Rev. George Burfield, D.D.,

with the regards of

the Author.

Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> 1867.

## P R E F A C E .

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A resolution, which had been prepared and was about to be submitted to the Synod, requesting the publication of the following Discourse, was withheld at the request of the author. He subsequently received the following communication, signed by some forty or fifty members of the Synod :

“The undersigned, members of the Synod of New Jersey, heard with interest and gratification your sermon at the opening of its sessions. They cannot but acknowledge the importance of the subject therein discussed. Believing that its *publication* would be of great advantage to any who are disposed to examine these views, as it certainly would be gratifying to the undersigned, they request you to put it into this more permanent form.”

The same reason which led to the preparation and delivery of the sermon, constrains me to consent to this request for its publication—the deep conviction, that “*THE BLESSED HOPE of the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*” does not occupy that place in the experience of His disciples now, that it did in past ages of the Christian Church; and that this is due to a departure, not only from the doctrine of the Standards of our Church and the other Churches of the Reformation, but from the faith of Apostolic times.

As many regard the whole subject of unfulfilled prophecy as obscure and of little practical value, and consequently feel justified in treating it with comparative neglect, it may not be

out of place here to direct attention to the fact that the particular subject of this discourse does not belong to that portion of the Scriptures which is distinctively prophetic. It has nothing to do with the interpretation of prophetic symbols or prophetic numbers. Whilst it undoubtedly has an important bearing on—I might say, lies at the basis of—the whole subject of Eschatology, its prominence in the word of God would not be diminished, but would probably be only the more distinctly apprehended and fully appreciated, had the book of Daniel and the Apocalypse of John never been written. It occurs most prominently in the discourses of the Saviour and in the Apostolical Epistles—the very portion of God's word which was given for the special purpose of directing the faith and practice of New Testament saints. It is presented there repeatedly, and always as of the highest practical moment; so that we cannot either ignore it or mistake it, without serious spiritual detriment.

The single aim of this discourse is to “hold it forth” as it is presented in that portion of “the word of life” just mentioned. The number and character of the signers to the above request, encourage the hope, that, by the blessing of God, the publication of the sermon may contribute somewhat to the end for which it was written.

It may be proper to add, that in accordance with the suggestion of several of the signers of the request for its publication, the discourse, as here printed, is a more full discussion of the subject than was possible in a sermon prepared for delivery.

An Appendix has been added containing an examination of every passage of Scripture not noticed in the discourse or the notes, supposed to have any bearing upon the interpretation of the text.

J. T. D.

## DISCOURSE.

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“ Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”  
MATTHEW xxiv. 42.

THE most momentous fact recorded in history is the incarnation—God on earth in the likeness of men. The most momentous event revealed in prophecy is the return again to this earth of the incarnate God “in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him.”

Whilst all who receive the Scriptures as the word of God agree as to the *fact* that Christ shall come again, the Church—at the present day, at least—is divided in opinion as to what we should believe in regard to the *time* of the glorious appearing.

Some undertake to determine from prophecy, not the day and hour indeed, but the precise year in which the Advent shall occur; and many, as you are aware, suppose that this present year is the year indicated.

An opinion directly opposite to this, is that which prevails so largely at the present day, that it may be said to be the *common* theory on the subject. It is, that the precise time of the Advent cannot be known beforehand, but of this we may rest

assured, it is not near at hand; that this event shall not occur until after certain other predicted events yet future, and requiring a long period for their fulfilment; that the world is yet to be converted; that a long era of universal righteousness and peace—symbolized by the Apocalyptic binding of Satan for a thousand years—is to follow; that Satan being loosed again for a season, an apostasy, to a greater or less extent, shall occur; and that *then*, and not before, Christ shall come to judge the world, destroy his enemies, and set up his everlasting kingdom. It is accordingly maintained that to look for the Advent of the Lord in our day, or for centuries to come, is an idle expectation, originating in a narrow and superficial view of unfulfilled prophecy.

A third doctrine on this subject is that taught in our Standards—the closing article of the Confession of our Faith. It is there expressed in these words, that Christ “will have the day of His coming unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security and be ever watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” This doctrine of our Confession differs, as you perceive, from both those previously mentioned. As opposed to the former, it teaches that Christ “will have the day of his coming unknown to men.” As opposed to the latter, it teaches, that the very reason why He will have the day unknown, is that men may be “ever watchful” for it. Our doctrine does not say, “the coming of Christ is certainly just at

hand;" much less does it say, "the coming of Christ is certainly not at hand;" it says, "the coming *may be* just at hand"—the time is unknown, the event is therefore ever imminent, and as such, should be ever looked for with expectation and preparation.

In the discharge of the duty which devolves upon me on this occasion, I venture, brethren, to submit for your consideration some of those reasons which constrain me to adhere to the at present unpopular doctrine on this subject—the doctrine of our Confession—particularly, as it stands opposed to the theory which says, "my Lord delayeth His coming."

Allow me to say here, that this subject, as it presents itself to my mind, has an interest far deeper and more sacred than that of mere curiosity in regard to the future. Whilst the doctrine of the Second Advent, as every other doctrine of holy Scripture, may be discussed, and too often doubtless is discussed, without any practical end in view; whilst, moreover, comparatively unimportant questions, connected more or less intimately with this particular theme, have been the occasion of so much dogmatism and "doubtful disputation," as to render the whole subject, to many minds, distasteful; it is nevertheless undeniable, that next to the mystery of redeeming love, no truth of our holy religion is more prominently presented in God's word as a constraining motive to vigilance and fidelity in the Master's service, to personal holiness, to the resisting of temptation and the patient endurance of suffering, than "THAT BLESSED HOPE"—as Paul cha

racterizes it—“*the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*” “Watch,” is the Master’s repeated admonition to the disciples, “be ye also ready, *for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.*” Matt. xxiv. 44. “And what I say unto you I say unto all, watch.” Mark xiii. 37. “The night is far spent, *the day is at hand,*” says Paul, “let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.” Rom. xiii. 12. “What manner of persons,” asks Peter, “ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, *looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.*” 2 Peter iii. 11, 12. “Every man,” says the beloved disciple, “that hath *this hope* in him, purifieth himself.” 1 John iii. 3. “Be patient, brethren,” is the exhortation of James to suffering saints, “*the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*” James v. 7, 8.

Not only is “this blessed hope” thus prominently held forth as an incentive to duty—the cherishing of it is presented as *the distinctive characteristic of a follower of the Lamb.* “There is laid up for me,” says Paul, “a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day, and not to me only, but unto *all them also that love His appearing.*” 2 Tim. iv. 8. “Unto *them that look for Him* shall He appear, the second time, without sin, unto salvation.” Heb. ix. 10.

As “His appearing and His kingdom” are conjoined, 2 Tim. iv. 1, Matt. xxv. 31, Christ has made the desire for His “appearing” part of the



first petition of our daily prayer. That His followers might have it ever in view, He reminds them of it in every administration of that Holy Sacrament, in which we “do show the Lord’s death *until He come.*” “Paul in all his Epistles, speaketh of *these things.*” 2 Peter iii. 16. Peter speaks of it again and again in his first Epistle, and then makes it the one theme of a second Epistle. James and John, and even Jude in his brief Epistle, fail not to hold it prominently forth. The Apocalypse opens with the announcement, “*Behold, He cometh;*” and the parting breath of inspiration is heard uttering, “*Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.*”

The anti-millennarian Dr. Brown of Glasgow, in his work on the Second Advent—the ablest treatise, by the way, we have met with in defence of the common theory—with a candor worthy of all imitation, says, “Premillennialists have done the Church a service by calling attention to the place which the Second Advent holds in the word of God and the scheme of divine truth. When they dilate upon the prominence given to this doctrine in the Scriptures, and the practical uses which are there made of it, they touch a chord in the heart of every simple lover of the Lord, and carry conviction to all who tremble at his word. With them we affirm, that the Redeemer’s Second appearing is the very pole-star of the Church. That it is so set forth in the New Testament is beyond all dispute.”

Brethren, if any apology be deemed necessary for selecting as the subject of discourse on this occa-

sion, a theme occupying such a place in the word of God, I should find the apology in the very fact that an apology was deemed necessary.

We propose then for consideration the inquiry, *Is the above-mentioned doctrine of our Confession the doctrine of God's word?*

You will have observed, that on the particular subject of our inquiry—a subject so wholly a matter of revelation—the framers of our 'Standards wisely incorporated, as the formula of their faith, the very language of our text, "Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." It might have been supposed that whatever other article of our faith would be controverted, this one—expressed in the words which fell from the Master's lips—would have been permitted to pass unchallenged. And yet exception has been taken to the doctrine of our Church on this point as on others. The question has been raised, not indeed as to the final authority of the language of Christ when rightly interpreted, but as to whether the true interpretation is that indicated by the connection in which the language is introduced in our Standards. It occurs in the chapter which treats of "The Last Judgment," and in the paragraph which teaches what we should believe in regard to the *time* of the Second Advent. The interpretation thus indicated has been called in question in two particulars.

First, as to *what coming of the Lord* is referred to in our text? It is maintained that Christ may be said "to come" in several different senses; that He

is not only to come again personally, but that He *comes* to each individual at death; that He *comes* in the events of Providence; that he *comes* by the operation of His Spirit; that He *comes* with special presence whenever two or three meet together in His name; and that He *comes* to every one who hears His voice and opens the door of the heart and is willing to receive Him. It is accordingly alleged, that when the Scriptures speak of "the coming of Christ," the language is ambiguous; that we cannot confidently say which of the *comings* above-mentioned is referred to, and probably err if we restrict the meaning to any one to the exclusion of all the others. It is frequently alleged further, that in our text the coming *primarily* referred to, was Christ's coming at the destruction of Jerusalem, and *secondarily*, His coming to each individual at death—in which latter sense alone is the admonition applicable to us.\*

To this we reply, that even if it were true that in the Scriptures Christ is said "to come" in the several senses mentioned, it would not follow that the meaning of the expression in any particular passage was either doubtful or double. The context may indicate what particular coming is referred to as unequivocally as if the different comings were ex-

\* As this notion of a *double sense* of Scripture has been the fruitful source of so much obscurity and positive error in the interpretation of God's word, we would call attention to the fact, that our Confession, Chap. I. Sec. ix., expressly teaches, that "the sense of any Scripture is not manifold, but one."

pressed by different words.\* We reply further, that whatever other passage of Scripture may be ambiguous, the particular coming referred to in our text *is* indicated by the connection beyond the possibility of a reasonable doubt.

The language in question occurs in the memorable discourse of Christ in answer to the inquiries of the disciples, "when shall these things (the destruction of Jerusalem, of which Christ had just been speaking) be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming (in the original, thy "*παρουσια*,"") and of the end of the world?" Now we ask particular attention to the fact, that two *distinct* events are here referred to—the destruction of Jerusalem and the "*παρουσια*" of Christ. The disciples evidently supposed that these two events would occur simultaneously; that at, and not before the coming of the Lord, Jerusalem would be destroyed; and that this epoch would be "the end of the world."† The

\* For an examination of the different passages of the New Testament not noticed in the Discourse or the Notes, in which *a coming of Christ* other than the Second Advent is supposed to be referred to, see Appendix A.

† Dr. Schaff, in Lange's Commentary, here remarks: "It should be kept in mind that when 'the end of the world' is spoken of in the New Testament, the term *αιων*—the present dispensation or order of things—is used, and not *κοσμος*—the planetary system, the created universe." This distinction is ordinarily, though not indeed invariably, observed in other connections than that mentioned, and the precise meaning of many passages is often misapprehended from not recognizing it.

By "the world," in the passage under consideration, we are un-

point to be observed, however, is, that they speak of the two events mentioned as *distinct*—though, as they then supposed, synchronous—events.

The Saviour, not regarding these inquiries of the disciples as many seem to regard similar inquiries now—as of trivial importance, not to say as indicating a spirit of carnal curiosity, to be repressed rather than encouraged—replies in a discourse that occupies a larger place in the Gospel histories than any other of his recorded discourses, not even excepting the Sermon on the Mount. Mark xiii., Luke xxi., Matt. xxiv. and xxv.

He first informs them, Matt. xxiv. 4—14, as to what would be the character of the present *αιων* or dispensation, up until its very end—wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, in the world; and the Church in tribulation by reason of persecutions from without, and heresies and deceivers within. He seems to intimate that the trials of the Church would increase as the end drew near. “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold, but he that shall endure to the end shall be saved.” The sign of the end which He then mentions, is an event which we have certainly much reason to believe is well nigh accomplished. “This

doubtedly to understand, the “*αιων ουτος*,” the “*νυν αιων*” of the New Testament, as distinguished from the “*αιων μελλων*”—“this world,” Matt. xii. 32, Luke xx. 34; “this present world,” 2 Tim. iv. 10, Titus ii. 12; “this present evil world,” Gal. i. 4, as distinguished from “the world to come,” whereof Paul speaks, which is to be in complete subjection to the God-man, Christ Jesus. Heb. ii. 5.

gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, *for a witness* unto all nations; and *then* shall the end come.”\*

After this general introduction, so to speak, the Saviour proceeds to reply *particularly* to the inquiries of the disciples. In reply to their *first* inquiry, in reference to *the destruction of Jerusalem*, he informs them fully as to the events which would immediately precede, and accompany, the desolation of the Holy City; adding, according to Luke, a declaration which is frequently overlooked, and yet is of much importance as connecting chronologically his answers to the two distinct questions of the disciples, “and they—that is, the Jews who survived the destruction of their city—shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Luke xxi. 24. Much of the obscurity which is frequently attributed to this discourse of the Saviour, arises from a neglect of the passage just quoted, and the consequent assumption that the judgments here predicted as in store for the Jewish nation, were completely fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The pre-

\* “The apostacy of the latter days and the universal dispersion of missions, are the two great signs of the end drawing near.”—*Alford*.

“The preaching of the gospel throughout the *Roman* world preceded the end of the Jewish state; the promulgation of the gospel throughout the *whole* world will be the sign of the end of the *αἰών* ὅστος.”—*Dr. Schaff*.

diction here made of the calamities that were to befall the Jews, is in the progress of fulfilment unto this day. They are still scattered "among all nations," Jerusalem is still "trodden down of the Gentiles," and not "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," shall the fulfilment of the language of Christ in reply to this first question of the disciples be consummated.

As the disciples supposed that *the destruction of Jerusalem*, and *that coming of Christ* of which they had spoken—His *παρουσια*—would be *synchronous* events, the Saviour in connection with His reply to their first inquiry corrects their error. He informs them that at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, "false Christs" would arise; and he forewarns them, "Then, if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there—believe it not. If they shall say, Behold he is in the desert—go not forth; Behold he is in the secret chambers—believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming (the *παρουσια*) of the Son of man be." Now the points to be here noticed are, first, that here for the first time in the Saviour's reply is *a coming* of Christ mentioned; second, that *the coming* here mentioned is "the *παρουσια*," mentioned by the disciples in their second inquiry; third, that *this coming* was *not* the destruction of Jerusalem, but an entirely distinct event; and, fourth, that it was *that coming* of Christ, of which the coming of the "false Christs"

was the counterfeit—the *personal*, glorious, advent of the Lord.

Having answered fully the first inquiry of the disciples, He proceeds to reply to their second inquiry, “what shall be the sign of *thy coming*—*thy παρουσία?*”

“Immediately,” says He, “after the tribulation of those days—that is, after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, and the treading down of the Holy City ‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’—shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” Luke adds what Matthew omits—indicating, possibly, though we may not say certainly, the literal meaning of the language of Matthew taken figuratively—“and there shall be distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth”—language, by the way, which every one must feel is a strikingly accurate description of this very present time. “And then,” says Luke, “shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.” Matthew’s record at this point is more full, and is made with evident reference to the precise language of the inquiry the Saviour is now answering—which inquiry Matthew alone records. “And then,” says he, “shall they see the *sign* of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the



Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Here we have *the coming*, which was the subject of the disciples' inquiry and the Saviour's answer—the *παρουσία* of Christ—distinctly defined, as “*the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*”

After admonishing the disciples by the parable of the fig-tree putting forth its leaves, to be watchful for the signs of His coming, the Saviour adds, “but of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall the coming (the *παρουσία*) of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming (the *παρουσία*) of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field—the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left.” Then follows the exhortation of our text, “*Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*”\*

Now we respectfully submit, whether anything

\* The single passage of *doubtful* meaning in the entire discourse of the Saviour, is His declaration, “this generation shall not pass (away) until all these things be fulfilled.” Matt. xxiv. 34, Mark xiii. 30, Luke xxi. 32. In regard to the meaning of this passage, see Appendix B.

further than this simple synopsis of our Saviour's discourse up to this point, is necessary to justify what we asserted above, that whatever other passage of Scripture might be ambiguous, the particular coming of Christ referred to in our text, was indicated by the connection, beyond the possibility of a reasonable doubt? Can any other coming be possibly referred to, than *that* coming which was the subject of the disciples' inquiry, and the Saviour's answer—the *παρουσια* of Christ—which He himself describes as "the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"? If we are at liberty to attribute to the language of Scripture any meaning which the mere words, taken without reference to their immediate connection, may bear, is it not evident that the word of God may be made to mean anything or nothing according to the ingenuity of the interpreter? If this be admitted as a principle of interpretation, would it not be difficult to frame a proposition that might not be either proved or disproved at will, by the language of Scripture?

To avoid the manifest conclusion to which the interpretation of our text just given would lead—the *duty of watching for the personal coming of the Lord*—it is commonly alleged that the coming referred to in the text, was the figurative or providential coming of Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem. This objection involves a two-fold assumption; first, that the destruction of Jerusalem was, in Scripture phraseology, *a coming of Christ* at all.

If at all, the only instance is the instance in question—and with what reason, or rather the absence of all reason, the assumption is made here, we have already seen—and one other doubtful passage, “there be some standing here which shall not taste of death until they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom.” Matt. xvi. 28.\* But a second, and still more gross assumption, is, that the coming of our text refers to the destruction of Jerusalem *exclusively*—*exclusively*, be it observed, of the event with which the text is in immediate connection; and an event, moreover, which is not merely by a figure of speech, a coming of the Lord, but literally and eminently, *the coming of the Lord*—“the coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” We have said *exclusively*, for if any one chooses to maintain that the coming of the text refers to *both* events—that the full meaning of the Saviour’s exhortation was, until the destruction of Jerusalem his disciples were to watch for *that* event, and after the destruction of Jerusalem His disciples were to watch for *His personal appearing*—the main point, the practical point, for which we are contending is admitted; Jerusalem has certainly been destroyed, and that it is now our duty to watch for Christ’s personal appearing, would be as fully established by the interpretation just mentioned, as if this were the only duty to which the text was intended to be an exhortation.

The objection to our doctrine, just mentioned, is

\* See Appendix A.

so common, and made with so much confidence, that we may be allowed to state again distinctly the reply to it. Two events are the subject of the Saviour's discourse. One of these events, if it may be called "a coming of Christ" at all, may be so called, in any case, only by a figure of speech, and in the case in question, there is not the slightest intimation that any such figure was employed. The other event is the literal, personal, coming of the Lord. In immediate connection with this latter event, is an exhortation to watch for the Lord's coming. Now do we use language not justified by the fact, when we say, it is a gross assumption to maintain that the exhortation refers, not to the latter event, but to the former—and to the former moreover, exclusively?\*

\* As the destruction of Jerusalem was to precede the Parousia—"the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"—the destruction of Jerusalem was of course the *immediate* object of expectation of those living before that event, who gave heed to the Saviour's exhortation. It does not follow from this, however, that the destruction of Jerusalem was itself either *a coming of the Lord*, or *the coming of the Lord* referred to in the text. The Psalmist furnishes us with an exact illustration of the duty enjoined in the text, as it applied to the disciples—"My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." Psalm cxxx. 6. While it is yet night, the immediate object of the watcher's expectation is not the rising of the sun, but the dawn and the day-star. And yet neither the dawn nor the day-star is the sun. The watcher is on the look-out indeed for the day-star, but it is for the sun that he is "watching."

This relation of the destruction of Jerusalem to "the coming" of which the Saviour is speaking, is brought out distinctly in the parable of the figtree. "When his branch is yet tender and

But, again, it is frequently alleged, that *the coming* referred to in our text is *Christ's coming to each individual at death*. This is, if possible, a still more gross assumption. The destruction of Jerusalem was at least, one of the subjects of the disciples' inquiry and the Saviour's answer, but *death* is not even alluded to by either. To maintain, nevertheless, that *death* is *the coming* referred to—what is it, but an entirely gratuitous assumption? We confess to the difficulty of replying to it by any argument, inasmuch as it has not even the pretence of an argument in its favor. All that can be done—and we cannot but feel, all that is necessary—is to state distinctly the question at issue. It is not whether it is our duty to be ever prepared for death; nor even whether *death* may be legitimately spoken of as *a coming of Christ*; but the question is this, Is death the coming referred to in the text? Or more precisely still, is death the event *exclusively* referred to?—for we again remark, that if any one sees fit to maintain that the exhortation of the text refers to *both* events—to Christ's coming to each individual at death, and also His literal “coming in the clouds

putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things (the things that were to precede the coming, including of course the destruction of Jerusalem) know that it (the coming) is near, even at the doors.”

It should be noticed, further, the Saviour declares of the event of which he is here speaking, “of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only.” Now this cannot refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, for Daniel had predicted the precise time of that event. Daniel ix. 24—27.

of heaven, with power and great glory, we should not regard the question raised as worth controverting, since all for which we are contending would be admitted.

Whether *death* is ever referred to in the Scriptures, as *a coming of Christ*, we are not called on here to discuss. It is, to say the least, extremely doubtful. As however the second coming of the Lord and death are alike, in that both events are ever imminent; and also, in that the occurrence of either would fix our everlasting destiny, the admonitions and exhortations of the Scriptures, with reference to the former event, are of course readily—and we may say, legitimately—applicable to the latter, by way of accommodation, but we should ever bear in mind, *by way of accommodation* only. We do greatly err, if, beyond this appropriation of Scripture language to a subject not in the mind of the sacred writer or speaker, we lose sight of the sense primarily intended; much more do we err if we presume to regard the one sense as a full and adequate substitute for the other. For whilst the two events in question are alike in the respects mentioned, they are wholly unlike—we might almost say, opposite—in other and most important respects; especially in this eminently practical respect, in the different feelings which the anticipation of the two events is calculated to excite in the mind of the believer. “Death, says Baxter, “appeareth to me as as an enemy, and my nature doth abhor and fear it, but the thoughts of the coming of

the Lord are most sweet and precious. Christ's servants can submit to death, but His coming they love and long for." Dr. Brown, in his work on the Second Advent, previously referred to, remarks, "The coming of Christ to individuals at death, whatever profitable considerations it may suggest, is not fitted to take that place in the view of the believer, which the Scripture assigns to the Second Advent. The death of the believer, however changed in virtue of his union to Christ, is intrinsically, not joyous but grievous. The Redeemer's second appearing, however, is an event of unmingled joyousness. How then can the former event awaken feelings, I will not say equally intense, but even of the same kind, as the latter." If this be so, brethren, is our whole duty with respect to the Master's repeated exhortation fulfilled, when we appropriate the language in admonishing men to prepare for the hour of death? Shall we be "found faithful" to the trust committed unto us, if we give not at least equal prominence to the exhortation, in the sense which the Master intended when He uttered it, and admonish our fellow-men to watch for the personal, glorious, appearing of the Lord, "because they know not at what hour the Lord doth come"?

In our defence of the doctrine of our Confession on the point immediately under consideration, we have thus far confined our attention to the evidence furnished by the connection in which the text occurs. However complete, of itself, this evidence, we have by no means exhausted the scriptural ar-

gument on the subject. The interpretation of our text given in our Standards is abundantly confirmed, were confirmation necessary, *by the repeated and uniform teaching of the Apostles.*

Whether death, or any other event of providence, or the operation of the Spirit, may with propriety be called *a coming of Christ*, or not, we affirm, without fear of successful contradiction, that the familiar New Testament expressions "the coming of Christ," "the coming of the Lord," "the coming of the Son of man," have a fixed and invariable meaning—that they are used to denote *the second personal appearing* of the Saviour, and in no one instance are they used with reference to any other event.

The term in the original corresponding to "*the coming*" of our version is not, as our translation might lead us to suppose, a word derived from the ordinary Greek verb denoting "to come" (*ερχομαι*). In one single instance, 1 Cor. i. 7, the word in the original is "*αποκαλυψις*"—literally, *the apocalypse, the revelation* of the Lord. In the other seventeen instances in which the expression "*the coming*" occurs in our version, the term in the original is "*παρουσια*"—a term which denotes as precisely as possible by any single word, *personal presence*.\*

\* The following are all the passages of the New Testament in which the term *παρουσια* occurs in other connections than that in question.

1st Cor. xvi. 17. "I am glad of the coming (*παρουσια*) of Stephanas and Fortunatus."

2d Cor. vii. 6, 7. "God comforted us by the coming (*παρουσια*)



of the expression—"the coming"—in the single exceptional case mentioned, will not, we presume, be called in question. Paul commends the Corinthians in that they "came behind in no gift, waiting for *the coming* (*αποκαλυψις*) of our Lord Jesus Christ." No one, we take for granted, will seriously maintain that Paul here means, that the Corinthians were waiting for death, or some event of providence, or some operation of the Spirit, or Christ's presence in their religious assemblies, or in the heart of the believer. Their "waiting for the coming of our Lord" was undoubtedly the same as that of the Thessalonians, whose conversion from heathenism to Christianity the Apostle in his first Epistle to that Church describes in language, which we commend to the consideration of those who would charge us with over-estimating the importance of the doctrine of the Second Advent: "ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and *to wait for His Son from heaven.*" This language at least, is unequivocal. Observe in passing, by these two strokes of his pencil—"serving the living God and waiting for His Son from heaven"—Paul sketches the portrait of a Thessalonian convert. Do we recognize

of Titus, and not by his coming (*παρουσια*) only," &c. ; x. 10, "His bodily presence (*παρουσια*) is weak."

Phil. i. 26. "By my coming (*παρουσια*) to you again;" ii. 12, "Not as in my presence (*παρουσια*) only."

2d Thess. ii. 9. "That wicked one—whose coming (*παρουσια*) is after the working of Satan."

in it the likeness of a disciple now? And if not, brethren, why not?

As to the other, and with the single exception mentioned, the invariable word in the original, corresponding to "the coming" of our version—the word "*παρουσια*"—its strict etymological signification of itself, goes far toward establishing what we have asserted as to its meaning. But it is the connection in which it ordinarily occurs, and the manner of its use by the Apostles that completes the demonstration. They speak of *the παρουσια of Christ* as familiarly as they do of *the resurrection of Christ*, and with no more intimation of the possibility of misapprehending their meaning in the one case than in the other. Frequently the meaning of the expression is clearly indicated by the context; frequently the meaning is not thus *expressly* indicated—the term being used as one well-understood and unmistakable—and in no single instance is there the slightest ground for doubt as to its signification. It is used, moreover, as convertible—and hence identical in signification—with that other familiar New Testament expression, "the day of the Lord"—the meaning of which, we take for granted, is beyond dispute. Compare 1 Thess. iv. 15 with v. 2. See also, 2 Thess. ii. 1, 2; 2 Peter iii. 4, 10, 12.

The force of these statements can only be appreciated by quotation. The term in question first occurs in the inquiry of the disciples already referred to, "what shall be the sign of thy *παρουσια*, and of the end of the world?" The Saviour in reply tells

them of "the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," adding, "as the days of Noah were, so shall the *παρουσια* of the Son of man be," and again in the next verse but one, "they knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so also shall the *παρουσια* of the Son of man be." The use of the expression here seems to have settled its signification in the minds of the Apostles, and it is henceforth used by them as a technical term, so to speak, to denote *the second personal appearing of the Lord*. We cannot, of course, quote here all the passages in which the word occurs. We take as an example, its use in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, where it occurs no less than four times. "What," asks Paul, "is our hope or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord at his *παρουσια*?" Again, he prays, "the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another—to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the *παρουσια* of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." Again, he says, "we which are alive and remain until the *παρουσια* of the Lord, shall not prevent them that are asleep." Again, his prayer is, that "God would preserve their whole spirit and soul and body blameless until the *παρουσια* of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now we respectfully submit, is the meaning of the Apostle in either of these passages, obscured, or in any way affected, by the fact—if fact it be—that

elsewhere Christ is said "to come" at death, or in providence, or by His Spirit? That the meaning of the expression in question is less clear and unequivocal in any other passage of the New Testament Epistles, we have no hesitation in saying, that no one, after examination, will venture to assert.\* And if this be so, can there be the shadow of a doubt as to *what* coming is referred to by the Apostles when they speak of "the coming—the *παρουσια*—of the Lord?"

\* That the reader may have at hand the evidence of our assertion as to the meaning of the expression, "the coming" of our version—the *παρουσια* of the original—we give here all the passages of the New Testament in which the expression occurs, except those which have been already quoted above.

1st Cor. xv. 23, "Afterwards, they that are Christ's, at His *παρουσια*."

2d Thess. ii. 1, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the *παρουσια* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him; ii. 8, "Then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord . . . will destroy with the brightness of his *παρουσια*."

James v. 7, "Be patient, brethren, unto the *παρουσια* of the Lord;" v. 8, "The *παρουσια* of the Lord draweth nigh."

2d Peter i. 16, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto the power and *παρουσια* of our Lord Jesus Christ;" iii. 4, "Where is the promise of His *παρουσια*?" iii. 12, "Looking for and hasting unto the *παρουσια* of the day of God."

1st John ii. 28, "Abide in Him, that when he shall appear we shall not be ashamed before Him at his *παρουσια*."

As confirmatory of what we have said, as to the scriptural usage of the term, *παρουσια*, it is worthy of notice that in the four instances in the New Testament where the *first* Advent of Christ is, in terms, referred to, the expression employed is not *παρουσια*. In three instances the term employed is a derivative from the ordi-

The important bearing of the conclusion we here reach is evident. First, it exposes the utter groundlessness of the common assumption that the teaching of the New Testament, in regard to *the coming of the Lord*, is obscure and ambiguous. It makes manifest that the alleged reason for this obscurity—namely, that Christ may be said “to come” (*ερχομαι*) in several different senses—has nothing at all to do with the question—the question being as to the meaning of the expressions, “*the coming of Christ*,” “*the coming of the Lord*,” “*the coming of the Son of man*,” as they occur in the word of God. Is there any language of the Scriptures more unequivocal? Is not Peter justified in saying, with reference to this very subject—“the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”—“we have a *sure* word of prophecy”? Have we, brethren, the slightest ground for maintaining that it is an uncertain word, and that we may therefore disregard the Apostle’s significant admonition, “whereunto ye do well to take heed as unto a light shining in a dark place”? Secondly, the settled meaning of the term *παρουσια* in the Apostolical Epistles puts beyond all dispute the question, as to what coming of

nary Greek verb, denoting to come, (*ερχομαι*), and in the other instance, the term used is taken from the Septuagint version of Mal. iii. 2, “Who shall abide the day of his coming—*αισιδου*?”

Matt. xi. 3, and Luke vii. 19, “Art thou he that should come—literally, the coming one—*ὁ ερχομενος*.”

Acts vii. 52, “They have slain them which showed before of the coming (*εισελευς*) of the Just One;” xiii. 24, “When John had first preached, before His coming—*της αισιδου*.”

the Lord was the subject of the disciples' inquiry and the Saviour's answer, when they spoke of *the παρουσία of the Son of man*. And it has a still further bearing on the interpretation of our text. With reference to "the *παρουσία* of the Lord," (2 Thess. iv. 15,) and the synonymous expression, "the day of the Lord," (v. 2,) Paul repeats the very exhortation of the Saviour, "let us not sleep as do others, but let us *watch* and be sober." (v. 6.) The same exhortation in terms, if possible, more unmistakable, occurs in Peter's reply to the scoffers' question, "Where is the promise of his *παρουσία*?" "The day of the Lord," says he, "will come as a thief in the night. What manner of persons then, ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, *looking for* and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." 2d Epis. iv. 7. Of similar import is his exhortation in the first Epistle, "the end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober and *watch* unto prayer." These Scriptures, it does seem to me, establish beyond all controversy the interpretation which the framers of our Standards have given to the language of our text. They do more. If it could be demonstrated that we have misapprehended the Saviour's meaning in our text, it would still, on the ground of these Scriptures, remain true, that the doctrine of our Standards is the doctrine of God's word. Whatever be the meaning of the Saviour's exhortation, if the Apostolical Epistles be accepted as the rule of our faith, it is a clearly revealed duty to be "ever watchful" for "the glorious

appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

We proceed to the consideration of the second question which has been raised in regard to the interpretation given to our text in the Confession. It is, as to what is the precise force and meaning of the exhortation to "*watch*" for the coming of the Lord. Admitting, it is said, that the coming of the Lord here referred to is His second personal appearing, it does not follow from the exhortation to "*watch*" for this event, that we are to live in expectation of its occurrence, as an event near at hand and ever imminent; the duty here enjoined is fulfilled if, believing that Christ shall certainly come again, we endeavor so to live that we shall be accepted in that day, and that this we may do though we believe the event is yet in the distant future.

That the *fact* of Christ's coming again is, in itself considered, a truth of the highest practical moment, and one under the influence of which we should continually live, is undeniable, and so far as we know, undenied. That, however, is not the point here at issue. The question is this, do the Scriptures teach us nothing more on this subject than the mere *fact* of the Second Advent? And does, believing that the event shall certainly occur—but in the distant future—and endeavoring to live accordingly, fulfil the particular duty to which we are exhorted in our text, and in similar passages of God's word—the duty of "*watching*" for (γρηγορείτε,) "*looking for and hasting unto*" (προσδοκῶντας και

σπευδοντας,) “waiting for”—literally “expecting” (απεκδεχομενους)—the coming of the Lord? Our Confession, as you will find by reference, expressly discriminates between the practical uses which should be made of the momentous fact of the Advent, and that *watchfulness* for it to which we are exhorted in the text; and the question is, whether there is any just ground for this discrimination?

Brethren, slight as the distinction here may seem to be, it is nevertheless one of no ordinary importance. Whatever the particular duty in question may be, the frequency with which we are exhorted to its performance indicates the estimation in which it was held by Christ and the Apostles. Now if the exhortation mean, that we should be ever watchful for the personal appearing of the Lord, as an event ever possible, and we understand it to be simply an exhortation to prepare for Christ's coming in the distant future, the error is a threefold evil. It leads to the neglect of the commanded duty. It causes us to regard the very performance of the duty as the indulgence of an idle—not to say, hurtful—expectation; and it destroys in a great measure the practical effect of the prospect of the Advent, as an incentive to the performance of all other duties. The difference in the practical effect of the prospect of the Advent when we believe it to be far distant, and when we believe it to be ever imminent, is illustrated, by the different effects which the prospect of death produces, when in carnal security we imagine that our life will certainly be lengthened out for many



years to come, and when by some providence of God we are brought to feel that "this night" our soul may be required of us. It is therefore a matter of eminent practical importance that we rightly apprehend the precise meaning of the repeated exhortation, "watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

To determine this aright, we remark: It will not be denied that *preparing for* an event which we believe to be in the distant future, and *watching for it, looking for it, expecting it*, are entirely different attitudes of the mind. Now to say the least, it would be strange, if Christ and the Apostles intended to express the former idea, and yet should uniformly use the very terms they would have used, had they intended to express the latter.

But not to dwell upon the fact that these terms should be understood in their ordinary and proper signification, unless there be some manifest and conclusive reason to the contrary, we maintain that their precise meaning in the connection in question, is indicated explicitly and unequivocally, *by the reason annexed to the exhortation*. It is *not* the mere fact of the Advent, but *the uncertainty as to the time of it*, that is urged as the reason for the particular duty here enjoined. The language of the Saviour is not, "watch, for the Lord shall surely come again," but it is, "watch, *for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*." To put, as it were, His meaning beyond all doubt or questioning, the Saviour goes on at length, to illustrate and enforce

it. "If the good man of the house," He adds, "had known at what watch the thief would come, he would have *watched* and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore, be ye also ready, *for in such an hour as ye think not* the Son of man cometh." Then follows His commendation of the faithful servant who lived in expectation of his master's return, and His condemnation of the faithless servant "who said in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming." Observe, the sin of this faithless servant was not that he denied or doubted the *fact* of the master's return—he acknowledges the fact in the very words attributed to him. What led to his condemnation was, saying in his heart, "My lord *delayeth* his coming." To impress yet more distinctly and deeply on the minds of the disciples the precise duty to which He had exhorted them, the Saviour adds still further, the parable of the ten virgins; and as if to avoid the possibility of mistake as to its meaning, He himself interprets it, by repeating at its close the exhortation which it was designed to illustrate and enforce, "watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

On another occasion, according to Luke, He addresses to the disciples a similar exhortation. "Let your loins be girded and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that *wait for* their lord when he will return from the wedding. Blessed are those servants whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find *watching*. Be ye therefore ready also, for the Son

of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." Luke xii. 35, 36, 37, 40.

Now in view of this full and explicit instruction of Christ, on the very point under consideration, is it possible to attribute any other meaning to the language of our text than that given to it in the Confession? Is it conceivable, that after all, we can fulfil the duty to which we are here exhorted, and yet at the same time say, My Lord delayeth His coming—the event is in the distant future—to watch for His appearing now is a vain and hurtful expectation? What is this but to make the very reason for the exhortation, which the Saviour urges with so much earnestness, to be wholly irrelevant, not to say, wholly erroneous?

But further, the doctrine of our Confession, on the point immediately under consideration is again confirmed, were confirmation necessary, by the uniform language of the Apostolical Epistles. The holy Apostles, writing "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," in imitation of the Master continually urge, not the mere *fact* of the Advent, but the *nearness* of it, and the *uncertainty as to the time* of it, as the incentive to continual watchfulness and fidelity. "The night is *far spent*; the day is *at hand*; let us *therefore* cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." Rom. xiii. 12. "Let your moderation be known unto all men—the Lord is *at hand*." Phil. iv. 5. "Be patient, brethren, the coming of the Lord *draweth nigh*. Behold the Judge standeth *at the door*." James v. 7, 9. "The

end of all things is *at hand*, be ye *therefore* sober and watch unto prayer." 1 Peter iv. 7. "The day of Lord cometh *as a thief in the night*—*therefore*, let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thess. v. 2, 6.

Brethren, is this uniform language of the inspired Apóstles accidental? Or is it wholly meaningless? Or if not wholly undesigned and without meaning, does the word of God teach any duty more distinctly and repeatedly than the duty—not merely of believing in the *fact* of the Lord's Advent—much less that it is to be regarded as an event in the distant future—but believing in the *nearness* of it, regarding it as *ever imminent*, and looking for it continually with expectation and preparation?

The argument on the point immediately under consideration, however conclusive already, is not exhausted. We remark further, we all—and especially those of us who reject the doctrine of our Confession—habitually use the language of our text, "Watch, ~~for~~ ye know not what hour the Lord doth come," and the parallel passage, "Watch, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh," as language, if not intended for, at least precisely adapted to our purpose, when we would admonish men to prepare for the ever-imminent hour of death. Now when we use this language, is it simply to remind men that death, sooner or later, is inevitable? Or is it not for the very purpose of reminding them that death is *ever imminent*? Suppose one of our hearers should say, "death is in-

deed inevitable, and I endeavor to keep that fact constantly in view; but I do not believe that I shall die to-day, nor for many years to come." Would we say to such an one, "*that* is the view of death which we are exhorting you to cherish—*that* is precisely what we meant when we said, "Watch, for ye know not the hour"? Or if the very supposition that we could make such a reply is preposterous, is it less so to attribute a similar meaning to the language as it came from the Saviour's lips, and maintain that He simply exhorts us to prepare for His coming as an event in the distant future, when He says, "Watch, for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come"—"Watch, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh"? Is not the habitual appropriation of these words, as an admonition to prepare for death as *ever imminent*, an emphatic acknowledgment by those with whom we are contending, that the language immediately under consideration—"Watch, for ye know not the hour"—admits of no other possible meaning than that attributed to it in our Confession?

The argument is not yet exhausted. That the doctrine of our Confession on both the points that have been called in question is the doctrine of God's word, is established—independently of all that we have thus far said, and yet, as it seems to me, in itself, conclusively—by the acknowledged fact, alluded to above, that the Apostolic Church, under the immediate instruction of the holy men who spoke as well as wrote "as they were moved

by the Holy Ghost," regarded the *personal* coming of Christ as an event near at hand, and "looked for" it with longing expectation. This fact—so important in its bearing on the question as to the meaning of the repeated exhortations of Christ and the Apostles with reference to "the coming of the Lord"—is not, so far as we know, disputed. Dr. Hodge, in his Commentary on first Cor. i. 7, says, "The Second Advent of Christ, so clearly predicted by Himself and His Apostles, was the object of longing expectation to all the early Christians. So general was this expectation that Christians were characterized as those who 'love His appearing.'" He remarks further—and we commend it, brethren, to your consideration—"If the second coming of Christ is to Christians of the present day less an object of desire than it was to their brethren during the Apostolic age, it must be because they think the Lord is 'slack concerning His promise,' and forget that with Him 'a thousand years is as one day.'" On the same passage Mr. Barnes says, "the earnest expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus became one of the marks of early Christian piety."

Now if the question were as to the meaning of some obscure and unimportant passage of Scripture, the interpretation of the Apostolic Church might not be regarded as authoritative and final. But when the question is, as to a subject repeatedly and prominently presented, by both Christ and the Apostles—presented too as a matter of the highest practical moment, and in terms moreover which im-

ply that the subject was familiarly known and well understood—is it not simply incredible, that after all, not merely here and there an ignorant believer, but that the whole body of believers—the Church, in which dwells the Spirit promised as a guide to truth—should have entirely misapprehended the meaning of their inspired teachers, and have been, not merely in doubt, but in positive error, as to what the duty was to which they were exhorted?

But it is said, since eighteen centuries have actually passed and Christ has not yet come, has not the result demonstrated that the Apostolic Church *was* in error on this subject? The answer to the plausible objection implied in this inquiry, is simply this; if the early Christians believed that Christ would *certainly* come in their day they certainly were in error, but if they believed, as they did believe—just what the framers of our Standards believed—that for aught that was revealed Christ *might* come in their day, and accordingly lived in longing expectation of the occurrence of the event as *ever possible*, they were not in error, but both in faith and practice fulfilled an eminent Christian duty. If one should say, “I may die to-day,” and endeavors to live with the possibility of his speedy departure from this world constantly in view, will it be said that he was in error, and cherished a mistaken apprehension, if his life be lengthened out for years to come? Just this, and no more, was the error of the Apostolic Church as to the time of the Advent.

But again it is said, the Apostolic Church did

undoubtedly expect the speedy coming of the Lord, but does not Paul in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians endeavor expressly, to correct their misapprehension on this subject. It must be admitted that in our version of the Scriptures, Paul, in the passage referred to, is represented as *contradicting in terms* what not only the other Apostles, but what he himself elsewhere repeatedly and uniformly teaches—namely, that “the day of Christ *is* at hand.” We need not repeat the familiar passages to this effect, many of which have been already quoted. How then are we to reconcile this apparent contradiction? The explanation is simply this; our translators have used the same expression—“at hand”—for two entirely different words in the original, the precise meaning of one of these words being “is near,” the precise meaning of the other, “is present.” Now the former is that which the Apostles uniformly employ when they are represented as teaching that the day of the Lord is “at hand.” What Paul *does* write to the Romans is, “the night is far spent, the day *is near* (*γγιζειν*)” Rom. xiii. 12; and to the Philippians, “let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord *is near* (*εγγυς*)” Phil. iv. 5. So Peter in his first Epistle, “the end of all things *is near* (*γγιζει*)” 1 Peter iv. 7. So James in his exhortation to suffering saints, “Be patient, brethren, the coming of the Lord *is near* (*γγιζει*)” James v. 8.

Now in the passage in question—that in the 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians—where Paul is represented as admonishing them to “be not soon shaken



in mind as that the day of Christ is *at hand*," 2 Thess. ii. 2, the Apostle uses the other term referred to—*ενεστηκεν*—the precise meaning of which is, "is present." And that this is its precise meaning is established beyond controversy, by its undoubted meaning in other connections in which the same Apostle uses it—as in Rom. viii. 38, "*things present*" (*ενεστωτα*) as contrasted with "things to come;" 1st Cor. iii. 22, "*things present*" (*ενεστωτα*) again as contrasted with "things to come;" 1st Cor. vii. 26, "the *present* distress" (*την ενεστωσαν αναγγην*;) Gal. i. 4, "this *present* evil world" (*του ενεστωτος αιωνος πονηρου*;) Heb. ix. 9, "the time then present" (*ενεστηχοτα*.)<sup>\*</sup> Brethren, whatever the Apostle intended to teach in the passage under consideration, he is not guilty of a contradiction in terms.

Another common misapprehension, as we believe, in regard to the Apostle's meaning in the passage in question—of less moment than that just mentioned, and yet deserving of notice—is, that when Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to "be not soon shaken in mind or troubled," he refers to agitation and alarm in the Thessalonian Church in view of the immediate coming of Christ. Apostolic Christians were not so affected by the prospect of Christ's speedy coming. It was to them a "blessed hope," and they "looked for" it and "hasted unto" it, with desire and longing. We understand the meaning of the Apostle

\* The only other instance in which the verb in question occurs in the New Testament, is in 2 Timothy iii. 1, "In the last days perilous times *shall come*." (*επιστησειται*.)

here to be, that they should not be *shaken in their faith*, or *troubled with doubts* as to the doctrine he had taught them in regard to the personal coming of the Lord. We so understand his meaning, not only for the reason just mentioned, but from the terms in which he repeats his admonition, after he had mentioned the reason why they should not “be soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us.” “Brethren,” says he, “*stand fast*, therefore, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our Epistle.” How fully and explicitly he had taught them, in the Epistle here referred to, the very doctrine which we are defending, may be seen by reference.

We understand, then, the Apostle’s admonition in the passage in question, to be this—be not soon shaken in your faith, or troubled with doubts, “as that the day of Christ *is present*.” Whether he here refers to the doctrine of those whom he elsewhere mentions, (2 Tim. ii. 18,) who held that “the resurrection is past already”—whose heresy, as is generally supposed, was, that the only resurrection was a spiritual, not literal, resurrection, and who doubtless held similar views in regard to the cognate subject, the coming of the Lord—or whether he refers to an expectation in the Thessalonian Church that Christ would certainly immediately appear, we need not stop to inquire. The Apostle undoubtedly goes on to teach, not only that the day of the Lord was not then present, but that it was not imme-

diately to occur; that there would first be “a falling away”—an apostasy—and the revelation of “the man of sin, the son of perdition;” and that then Christ would appear to destroy him, “by the spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming”—literally “the Epiphany of His Parousia.” But now, mark—as if to guard the Thessalonians against assuming that the Parousia was in the distant future, and saying in their hearts, My Lord delayeth His coming, the Apostle admonishes them, that “the mystery of iniquity doth *already* work;” that they knew “what withholdeth that the man of sin might be revealed;” that as soon as this power or agency which prevented for the time the revelation of the man of sin was “taken out of the way,” that wicked one should be revealed; and that then the Lord would come for his destruction. Now is there anything here in conflict with the elsewhere repeated and uniform teaching of the Apostles, that “the day of the Lord is near?” Is there anything even inconsistent with what the Apostle certainly seems to intimate in his first Epistle, the possibility—for aught that was revealed—that some of those whom he was addressing might be “alive and remain until the coming of the Lord”? What was to intervene was but the development of an agency “already” at work. What, at the time then present, prevented this development, was an agency which God could at any time take out of the way. Is there anything here taught which would have justified the Thessalonians in assuming that this preventing power

might not be soon "taken out of the way," the man of sin revealed and suddenly destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming?

In this connection, the language of John in his first Epistle, written some years later, deserves to be noticed. "Every spirit," says he, "that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God, and this is that spirit of Antichrist, *whereof ye have heard that it should come and even now already is in the world.*" 1 John iv. 3. Again, "as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, *even now* are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time"—literally, "the last hour." 1 John ii. 18.

From this important passage in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians—so often referred to, and, so far as we know, the only passage referred to, as a proof-text, by those who say, My Lord delayeth His coming—whatever else may be learned, three things at least are clearly taught. First, that neither Paul nor the Thessalonians attached any other idea to the New Testament expression, the *παρουσία* of Christ—which occurs in the first verse and also in the eighth—than the personal Advent of the Lord. The Apostle uses the expression as convertible, and hence identical in signification, with "the day of Christ." Second, the one prophetic event which, at the time Paul wrote this Epistle, was to anticipate the coming of the Lord, was, not a millennial era of righteousness and peace on earth, but, an apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin—the son of perdition. That Paul should have expected

a millennium of righteousness before the coming of the Lord, such as is commonly expected at the present day, and not have mentioned it here, when his very object is to state what *should* intervene before Christ's coming, is, to say the least, inexplicable. And third, the event—the only event—which Paul predicted would precede the coming, we have abundant reason to believe has occurred. The framers of our Confession taught that it had occurred even in their day. Chap. xxv. Sec. vi. That which, when Paul wrote, “withheld,” has been “taken out of the way,” and the man of sin has been revealed. Now whatever *the Thessalonians* were here taught to believe as to the nearness of Christ's coming, can *we* receive this language of the Apostle as the rule of *our* faith, and yet doubt, that “the night is far spent, the day—the day of the glorious appearing—is at hand”?

A complete discussion of the question proposed would require an examination of the Scripture evidence—if there be any—of a millennial era of righteousness and peace on earth before the coming of our Lord. This, want of time forbids. Let it suffice here to say, that the expectation of such a millennial era before the Advent, is strictly a modern idea—a novelty in the history of the Church. It was wholly unknown in Apostolic days. It was unknown in the Church of the Reformation, except to be repudiated. It is nowhere even alluded to in our Standards. When proposed, as it was about one hundred and fifty years ago by Whitby—who

may be said to be the father of it in the form in which it now generally prevails—it was proposed avowedly as “a new hypothesis.” Now, is it to be believed, that a doctrine so long wholly unrecognized by the Church, is nevertheless a doctrine of Holy Scripture, and moreover taught there so fully and explicitly, that notwithstanding the exhortation of our text and numerous other passages of similar import, we are justified in saying, not only in our heart but with the lips, “My Lord delayeth his coming”?

We have thus, brethren, endeavored to present as fully as the occasion will permit, some of those reasons which constrain us to accept the doctrine of our Confession on this subject, as the doctrine of God’s word. By the full and explicit and uniform teaching both of Christ and the Apostles, we feel shut up to the conclusion, that it is a clearly revealed duty, urgent now not less but more than in Apostolic days, to “look for and hasten unto the coming of the day of God”—to be “ever watchful” for “the glorious appearing,” because “we know not at what hour the Lord doth come.” And, brethren in the ministry of Christ and stewardship of the mysteries of God, in view of the prominent place this subject occupies in God’s word—in that portion of it, moreover, specially given to guide the faith and practice of the Church “until he come”—do we “rightly divide the word of truth” if we fail to give frequency and prominence to the exhortation of our text, “Watch, for ye know not at what

hour your Lord doth come"? Did the inspired Apostles—did Christ himself—overestimate the importance of this theme? Or has its value as a truth of the highest practical moment diminished? Is there less force in Paul's argument now than when he wrote to the Romans, "the night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us *therefore* put off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light?" Or is not "the day"—the day of Christ's appearing and our consummated redemption—nearer than when they thus believed? Does not each passing year but give increased emphasis to the Apostles' frequent word of warning and yet of comfort—"the Lord is at hand"? And, if we fail to proclaim this solemn, precious truth, do we declare the *whole* "counsel of God"? Is "the blessed hope" no part of the "glad tidings" which it is our high commission to preach to men? So thought not the great Apostle to the Gentiles—the Apostle, whom the Spirit of inspiration has made it our duty to imitate—so thought not Paul, when he gave the crowning place to "this blessed hope," in that admirable summary of Christian faith and practice which occurs in the Pastoral Epistle to Titus—"the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us: that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE AND THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.*" Learn from this Paul's estimate of our doctrine, and

give heed to the accompanying exhortation to Titus—and not only to Titus but to us, fellow-laborers with Titus, in the ministry of the word—“*these things* teach and exhort.”

Allow me in closing this discussion, to advert to the common—and were it well-founded, serious—objection to the doctrine we have been endeavoring to defend, namely, that it is hostile to the cause of missions, that to teach that we should be “ever watchful” for the coming of the Lord, and consequently are not to expect the conversion of the world and a millennium of righteousness before the Advent, is to take away, what is generally esteemed at least, the most powerful incentive to the fulfilment of the great commission, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

In reference to this objection, we suggest for your consideration, first: The incentive to the fulfilment of the great commission, which should ever occupy the foremost place in the estimation of the believer, and should be regarded as of itself a sufficient motive were there no other, is not, the prospect of success, but the command of Christ. His revealed will is not only the rule, but should be esteemed the most powerful incentive to the performance of duty.

Second: As to other and subordinate motives, are we justified in assuming that the prospect of a millennium of righteousness before Christ’s coming—which is nowhere alluded to in the word of God as an incentive to duty—is nevertheless a more power-



ful motive to fidelity in the Master's service than that motive which everywhere throughout the New Testament is prominently urged—"the blessed hope of the glorious appearing" of the Lord. Or to state the point in the language of the Anti-Millennarian, Dr. Brown, "If Christ's second coming, instead of being kept full in the view of the Church, as we find it in the New Testament, is shifted into the background, while other anticipations are advanced in its room, are we trembling at the authority and wisdom of God in his word, or are we not rather leaning on our own understanding?"

Third: As either theory involves the hope of the universal reign of righteousness on earth, is the prospect of the *speedy* manifestation of this Messianic kingdom—its manifestation whenever "the gospel of the kingdom shall have been preached unto all nations, *for a witness*"—less encouraging, than the belief that this kingdom is yet in the distant future, and to be established only after hard and protracted effort, and often for the time doubtful success, such as has hitherto characterized the progress of the conflict of the Church with the world.

Fourth: Was the effect of "this blessed hope" on the missionary spirit and martyr spirit of the primitive Church such that we should dread the effect if it prevailed now as it did then? Or is its actual effect now, so far as it does prevail, such as should lead us to deprecate its universal prevalence? From all the information we have been able to obtain we feel well-assured the proportion of so-called Millenarians

among our Missionaries at this present day is far greater than the proportion of Millenarians in the Church at large. Of six young men from our own Seminary, who offered themselves a year ago to our Board of Foreign Missions, four of them were Millenarians, and so far as we know, the only Millenarians at that time in the Seminary. Is not one such fact a conclusive reply to the objection that the prospect of Christ's speedy coming is hostile, or even unfavorable, to the cause of Missions? On this point we submit further, the testimony of one of our most sober-minded and devoted Missionaries—the lamented martyr, Walter Lowrie. "I have adopted," he writes to a friend, "many of the Millenarian views in regard to the second Advent. They seem to make many things in the history of Missions, which were dark before, much more plain and encouraging. I find much satisfaction in them and often long inexpressibly for 'the glorious appearing.' I have lost none of my confidence in preaching, but rather have felt it increased by these views."

Finally: To the lover of our Lord Jesus, is the prospect of His "glorious appearing" and a kingdom in which He shall reign personally, a less "blessed hope" than the prospect of a millennium without his personal presence. "If I were but sure," says Baxter, "that I should live to see the coming of the Lord, it would be the joyfulest tidings to me in the world. O that I might see His kingdom come! It is the characteristic of His saints to

“love his appearing” and “to look for that blessed hope.” The Spirit and the bride say, Come. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. “Come quickly,” is the language of faith and hope and love.” “The Lord’s bride,” says Rutherford, “will be up and down, above the water swimming or under the water sinking, until her lovely and mighty Redeemer and Husband set His head through the skies and give her the hoped-for inheritance. O, day dawn! O, time run fast! O, Bridegroom post, post fast, that we may meet! O, heavens cleave in two, that that bright face and head may set itself through the clouds!”

Brethren in gospel bonds—in “the bond of perfectness,” the bond of love—of love for one another as lovers together of Him who hath loved us unto the death—the bond that “abideth” when faith shall be exchanged for open vision, and hope for fruition—shall we dread the prevalence of the spirit which glowed in the hearts of these princes among God’s saints, lest peradventure our fervent zeal grow cold, and we become less faithful servants of the Master? Or has the Church in this our day a more crying need than to be baptized with the baptism of their spirit, that we too be found “*looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God*”? In the Master’s name, I therefore exhort you personally—and beseech you to exhort others—to “*watch, for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come.*” Let scoffers ask, “where is the promise of His coming?” “Brethren, ye are not in darkness, that

that day should overtake you unawares." "Ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord shall come"—that it shall come "as a thief in the night," "in an hour when men think not," at a time when the world in blindness is saying "peace and safety," aye, when even the vigil virgins are slumbering and sleeping—as the flood in the days of Noah—as the fire from heaven on Sodom—unexpected—unsuspected—"so shall the coming of the Son of man be." "Let us then, who are of the day, not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." With trimmed lamps and girded loins, let us watch and wait, with desire and expectation, for the coming of the Master, for "*blessed is that servant whom the Lord when He cometh shall find, WATCHING.*"

## APPENDIX A.

In Fairbairn's very interesting and instructive work on Prophecy, the question as to the different senses in which Christ is in the New Testament said to *come*, is fully discussed. The conclusion which the author endeavors to establish is, that "the question of Christ's Second Advent is not to be determined by the mere announcement of his coming;" that is, Christ is said to come in so many different senses, that when His "coming" is mentioned, we cannot infer from the mere expression that His Second Advent is *the coming* referred to.

That it may be seen how little ground there really is for this opinion, so commonly and confidently entertained—that the language of the New Testament in regard to the coming of Christ is ambiguous—we present the substance of Dr. Fairbairn's argument in its favor.

To show what "the presumption is" as to New Testament phraseology on the subject, our author adduces a number of passages from the Old Testament in which a "coming of the Lord" that is not personal, is either expressed or implied. As the question is not one of "presumption" but of *fact*, we need not stop to examine the passages referred to—they prove nothing as to the point at issue, namely, what phraseology the New Testament writers did actually employ.

On this point—the only point in question—Dr. Fairbairn says, "There is a coming spoken of in the New Testament which may be designated in the proper sense terminal, and therefore visible, so that every eye shall see it. And there are comings of a provisional kind, which all point toward the ultimate manifestation. The reference to both modes of coming is found in our Lord's own discourses on the subject."

The passage first adduced occurs in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, who beat some of their lord's servants, stoned others, and finally killed his son. "When the lord of the vineyard *cometh*," the Saviour asks, "what will he do unto those husbandmen?" Matt. xxi. 40. Now with all respect for our distinguished author, we cannot but regard this reference as irrelevant, first, because the coming here spoken of is part of the language of the *parable*, and does not occur in the interpretation of it which is subsequently given; and secondly and especially, because the coming here spoken of is not a coming of the son at all, but a coming of the lord of the vineyard. Certainly this has nothing to do with the question under consideration—the meaning of the New Testament expression, "the coming of Christ."

The second passage adduced occurs in the charge of the Saviour to the twelve when he for the first time sent them forth to preach in His name, commanding them "not to go into the way of the Gentiles nor into any city of the Samaritans," but "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "When they persecute you" says Christ, "in this city, flee into another; for verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel *till the Son of man be come.*" Matt. x. 23. "What possibly could be meant by this," our author asks, "but His coming to order and settle anew the affairs of His kingdom among men? Coming not in visible personality, yet in real majesty, first to endow His followers with power from on high, and cheer them with manifestations of His presence, and then to remove by His judgments the old polity and commonwealth out of the way."

The different interpretations according to Lange, which have been given of this passage are the following: 1. *until the victory of the cause of Christ* (Baumgarten—Crusius;) 2. *to the destruction of Jerusalem* (Michaelis and others;) 3. *to the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit* (Calvin and others;) 4. *till help shall be afforded by the Son of man* (Chrysostom;) 5. *till the second coming of Christ* (Meyer.) Lange very properly adds, "But the commentators forget that the Apostles only preceded Christ, and that this passage refers in the first place to that particular mission. Hence, we explain it: *till the Son of man shall overtake you.* (So also Heubner.") That this is most probably the true interpretation is confirmed by the record of the subsequent mission of the seventy, where it is expressly mentioned, He "sent them forth two and two before His face, into every city and place whither He himself would come." Lange adds, "the expression, however, is also symbolical, and applies to the Church generally. In this sense it points forward to the second coming of Christ; including at the same time the idea, that their apostolic labors in Judea would be cut short by the judgments impending over Jerusalem."

The third passage adduced by Dr. Fairbairn from the discourses of Christ, in support of his position, is Matt. xvi. 28, "verily I say unto you there be some standing here which shall not taste of death until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Mark says "until they see the kingdom of God come with power," ix. 1. Luke, "until they see the kingdom of God," ix. 27.

Dr. Alexander, in his Commentary on this passage as it occurs in Mark's Gospel, says, "This verse is one of the most difficult and disputed in the whole book." The different interpretations given by Lange are: 1. Chrysostom and many others understand the reference to be to *the Transfiguration*; 2. Grotius, Capellus, Wetstein, Ebrard, [Alford, Owen.]—*The destruction of Jerusalem and the founding of the Christian Church*; 3. Dörner—*the conquests and progress of the Gospel*; 4. Meyer and others—*the second Advent.* Lange himself understands the reference to be to "Christ's

Advent in the glory of His kingdom within the circle of His disciples"—fulfilled, "*when the Saviour rose from the dead and revealed Himself to them*" Mr. Barnes understands the reference to be to the day of Pentecost and the founding of the Christian Church. Dr. Alexander on this passage remarks, "The solutions of this question which have been proposed are objectionable, chiefly because too exclusive and restrictive of the promise to a single point of time, whereas it really has reference to a gradual or progressive change—the institution of Christ's kingdom in the hearts of men and in society at large—of which protracted process the two salient points are the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem, between which points—as those of its inception and consummation—lies the lingering death of the Mosaic dispensation and the gradual erection of Messiah's kingdom.

Without presuming to decide which of these different interpretations is the true one, we would state the reasons which favor the interpretation first-mentioned, namely, that the language in question was used with special reference to that manifestation of Himself, which Christ was soon to make to chosen witnesses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

1. This interpretation seems to be most in accordance with the language of the preceding context.

The occasion on which the words in question were uttered was a critical epoch in the Saviour's history. It marks the beginning of a new revelation to the disciples both of Himself, and of the work which he came to accomplish. The time had come for those who would be his disciples to make a formal, explicit profession of their faith in Him as *the Messiah*. In answer to His question, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter, speaking not only for himself but for the twelve, had declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus had uttered His memorable reply, "On this rock, I will build my Church." "*From that time forth,*" says Matthew, "He began to show unto His disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be put to death, and on the third day be raised again." He not only revealed to them that He himself must suffer many things and die; He made known to them that all who would follow Him must expect afflictions and persecutions even unto death for His sake. An announcement so contrary to all their previous anticipations could not but be a severe trial of their faith. He accordingly sets before them the ultimate consequences both of faithlessness and of fidelity. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. *For the Son of man shall come in his own glory, (Luke ix. 27,) and the glory of His Father and with His angels, and then shall He reward every man according to his works.*" (To appreciate fully the connection between this passage and that which

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fulfil the very end, which the event referred to in the Saviour's promise was to fulfil, namely, to confirm the faith of the disciples in Jesus as the Messiah. This is acknowledged even by those who do not regard the Transfiguration as the event referred to. Owen says, "The Divine splendor which on that occasion invested the Saviour was chiefly designed to strengthen the faith of His followers, to all of whom, after His resurrection, it was permitted to be told." Here then is an event which in its *form* corresponded with the coming predicted more precisely than did any other coming which those then living were permitted to behold. Moreover, it fulfilled the very *design* of the coming predicted. Is it not then probable that this event was the event referred to?

4. The Transfiguration is recorded by each of the three evangelists in immediate connection with the language under consideration. Not only are the records of the two events thus connected in *place*—they are connected in *terms*. "And after six days," says Matthew; "And after six days," says Mark; "And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings," says Luke. Was this careful connection in the record of the Transfiguration and the Saviour's promise, accidental? Or if designed, what design more probable than to indicate that the event thus recorded was the fulfilment of the prediction?

5. This interpretation receives strong confirmation from the language of Peter in the first chapter of his second Epistle. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the *power and coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were *eye-witnesses of His majesty*. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount." Is it a very violent assumption, to suppose, that the promise of the Saviour—"there be some standing here that shall not taste of death until they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom, with power"—was fulfilled, when subsequently some of those then present had granted unto them "a vision" (Matt. xvii. 9) of "the power and coming" of the Son of man—a vision, such that they were able subsequently to declare, that they had been "eye-witnesses of His majesty"?

[It is sometimes remarked that John, who was the only one of the Evangelists who beheld the Transfiguration, is the only one who makes no mention of it. Is not the Transfiguration the particular event referred to in the introduction to his Gospel, (i. 11,) when he says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father"?]

5. That the language in question, "the coming of the Son of man in His kingdom," is not any spiritual or providential coming, is confirmed further by the fact, that in every other instance in Scripture in which "the kingdom," and "the coming" of Christ

are associated, the kingdom referred to is that kingdom of glory which is to be manifested at the Second Advent. See 1 Tim. i. 4. Matt. xxiv. 31—34. Luke xix. 11—27. Luke xxi. 27—31. 1 Cor. xv. 50—52.

The only other passage in our Lord's discourses, quoted by Dr. Fairbairn as containing a reference to a coming of Christ not terminal and visible, is our text and context. The propriety of this reference has been discussed in the sermon.

After these references to our Lord's discourses, Dr. Fairbairn goes on to say, "There can be no doubt that the final return of the Saviour is often held forth in the New Testament as the great object of hope and expectation to the Church." He quotes to this effect several passages from the Acts and the Epistles, adding, "it is needless to multiply examples. But *such passages alternate with others in which a coming is spoken of* (the italics are our own) which is neither terminal, nor marked by any outward personal display." That we may not subject ourselves to the suspicion of misrepresentation, we give in full, in his own language, our author's attempt to substantiate this remarkable statement. He says, "the history detailed in the Book of the Acts, though formally that of the Apostles, appears more as the continuation of Christ's personal agency carried on through the instrumentality of the immediate actors, than of their own proper working. The wonders of Pentecost were exhibited as the evidences of Christ's exaltation and the fruit of His power. The miraculous healing of the poor cripple at the temple-gate, and the no less miraculous judgment on Ananias and Sapphira in the church were alike viewed as the result of Christ's outstretched hand; they happened because He (the Holy One whom the Father had anointed, iv. 27—30.) was present with the power of His Spirit to do signs and wonders. When the Apostles bore to other lands the gospel of salvation and planted Christian churches, Christ himself was declared to have come and preached peace by them. (Eph. ii. 17.) On Him, as a present living Saviour, they laid the foundation of a living Church." (1 Cor. iii. 10, 11.)

This is the entire argument to justify the assertion, that in the Book of the Acts, and in the Epistles, "*a coming which is neither terminal nor visible is spoken of*" so frequently, that the passages "*alternate*" with those referring to the terminal, visible, coming—which are so numerous that particular quotation is unnecessary. Now we respectfully submit, has the record of the evidences of Christ's abiding presence in His Church—which the sacred writers carefully avoid speaking of as *a coming* of Christ—anything to do with the question under consideration, namely, the meaning of the sacred writers when they do speak of Christ's "*coming*?" Or is not the legitimate inference the very opposite of that which Dr. Fairbairn would have us make? Does it not indicate that Christ's abiding presence in the Church—his fulfilment of the promise,

“Lo, I am with you always”—cannot with any propriety of speech be called a *coming* of Christ at all—or at least that the sacred writers so judged? Or if by an unnatural use of language an *abiding presence* might be called a “coming,” did not the sacred writers avoid that phraseology for the very purpose of preventing all doubt as to their meaning when they did speak of Christ’s “coming”?

According to Dr. Fairbairn’s own showing, the only passage in the New Testament, outside of the Gospels and the Apocalypse, in which a coming of Christ is spoken of, that can by possibility be understood as referring to any other coming than the Second Advent, is Eph. ii. 17, where it is said, Christ “*came and preached peace to you that were afar off and to them that were nigh.*” And in regard to this passage, is it beyond question that the Apostle here means anything more than the Saviour meant when he said, “I am come a light into the world, that *whosoever* believeth on me should not abide in darkness—I came not to judge the world, but to *save the world*”? John xii. 46, 47. What necessity is there for attributing any other meaning to the Apostle’s language except the necessity of the Doctor’s argument?

At the risk of needless repetition we call distinct attention to the fact, that on the authority of one so familiar with the Scriptures as our distinguished author, the only passages in the New Testament outside of the Apocalypse, in which a coming of Christ is mentioned that can by possibility be understood as referring to any other coming than the Second Advent, are the five following:

1. The coming spoken of in our text and context.
2. The coming of the Son of man which was to occur before the Apostles on their first mission—to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”—had “gone over the cities of Israel.” Matt. x. 23.
3. The coming of the Son of man mentioned in immediate connection with the account of the Transfiguration. Matt. xvi. 48.
4. The coming of the lord of the vineyard—not his son—alluded to in the parable of the wicked husbandmen. Matt. xxi. 40.
5. The coming of Christ when he “came and preached peace to them which were afar off and to them that were nigh.” Eph. ii. 17.

After these references to passages in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles, Dr. Fairbairn proceeds to remark, “In the book of the Revelation, more especially, where the final coming is most conspicuously displayed, providential and invisible comings are also most distinctly noticed.” A question might here be fairly raised as to the propriety of deriving from the language of the Apocalypse a rule for the interpretation of the phraseology of the other books of the New Testament, which are so different in character and purpose, and written many years before book of the Revelation. But passing this, what are the passages of the Apocalypse relied upon in support of the above statement?

The quotations are as follows: from the charge to the Church

of Ephesus, "Repent and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of his place (except thou repent." ii. 5.) Also, from the charge to the Church at Pergamos, "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly (and will fight against them—that hold the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes—with the sword of my mouth. ii. 16.) (The language in the parentheses is omitted by our author.) Also, from the charge to the Church at Sardis, "If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (iii. 3.) The following passage from the charge to the Church of Laodicea is also referred to, but not formally quoted, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." (iii. 20.)

Dr. Fairbairn might have extended his references by quoting from the charge to the Church of Thyatira, "Hold fast till I come" (ii. 25); and from the charge to the Church of Philadelphia, "Behold I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take my crown" (iii. 11); and from the charge to the Church of Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life" (ii. 10); where *the coming* is not indeed expressed in terms, but is distinctly implied, as appears from Paul's declaration, 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 unto all them that love His appearing."

In each of the seven charges, then, the coming of the Lord is referred to, and is presented moreover as the one great incentive to repentance, to constant watchfulness, and to steadfast fidelity. And now is *the coming* here referred to merely some "providential or invisible coming?" Or is it not that coming which is the great theme of the Apocalypse—the Apocalypse itself—that coming with the announcement of which the Book opens, "Behold, He cometh with clouds and every eye shall see him"? (i. 7.) Are not the Saviour's exhortations here identical in signification, with those repeatedly given elsewhere in the New Testament—"The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night, therefore watch and be sober;" "Be patient, brethren, the Parousia of the Lord draweth nigh"? Is not this unquestionably His meaning when He says to the Church of Philadelphia, "Behold, I come quickly," and to the Church of Thyatira, "Hold fast till I come"? And why suppose a different coming referred to in the charges to the other Churches? The admonition addressed to the Churches of Ephesus, and Pergamos and Smyrna, was not simply, that if they did not repent He would *come* to them; He was to come to all. The admonition was, that if they did not repent, they would at His coming be visited with judgments—if they did not watch, He would come upon them "as a thief—they knew not at what hour."

That the final coming of the Lord is the coming throughout

referred to, is further evident from the terms of the promises made at the close of the several addresses to the Churches, to "him that overcometh," the blessing promised in each case being one that is to be conferred at and not before the second Advent.

As another instance of a "providential or invisible coming" mentioned in the Apocalypse, Dr. Fairbairn refers to chapter x, where John says, "I saw another mighty angel *come down* from heaven, clothed with a cloud, &c." Now granting that the mighty angel here spoken of is none other than Christ himself, and that this record of what John saw in vision has any bearing upon the interpretation of the familiar New Testament expression, "the coming of Christ," the question may be fairly raised, whether the coming here symbolized is not the final coming of the Lord. The vision occurs after the vision of the judgments consequent on the sounding of the sixth trumpet. The "mighty angel" swears by Him that liveth forever and ever, that "*time shall be no longer*, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished." In the next chapter it is recorded, "And the seventh angel sounded and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." The four and twenty elders are heard giving thanks to God, and saying, "Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward to thy servants." xi. 15—18. It is true, the vision of the prophesying of the two witnesses intervenes, but Dr. Fairbairn in a previous part of his work has very properly interpreted this vision as "retrospective," and "embracing the whole time between the rise of the apostasy and its complete overthrow, which takes place at the sounding of the seventh trumpet. During this time the real Church is represented as occupying chiefly a witnessing condition—she can only deliver a testimony, and is therefore symbolized by two witnesses, the legal number for such a purpose."

Dr. Fairbairn refers to one other passage in proof of his position; "Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth." xvi. 15. Here again we ask, is it to be assumed as unquestionable that the coming referred to in this passage is any other than the final coming of the Lord? The record immediately following is, "And the seventh angel poured out his vial in the air, and there came a voice out of the temple of heaven from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and great Babylon came up in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath." Now when it is so distinctly foretold by Paul that the great apostasy, the man of sin, the son of perdition, is to be destroyed by "the brightness of Christ's Parousia"—his personal coming—is it to be assumed that the Apocalyptic