

THE NEW  
ESCHATOLOGY.

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Difference between the Letter and Spirit of Holy Scripture.

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BY  
J. G. BROUGHTON PEGG.



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## NOTE.

This little work was published in England several years ago; but has never before been republished in this country. It deals with those texts of Scripture which have generally been supposed to foretell the destruction of the material universe; and shows conclusively that these passages have been entirely misunderstood by commentators; and that, rightly interpreted, they have no reference whatever to the outer realm of matter, but to the inner realm of mind; to the internal condition of the church, the loss or destruction of heavenly charity, and the eclipse of genuine faith, which it was foreseen and foretold would occur at the close of the first Christian Dispensation.

It is proper to add, also, that, although the name of Swedenborg nowhere occurs in the book, it is evident that the author was familiar with his teachings, and viewed and treated his subject from the Swedenborgian stand-point. But with the lovers of spiritual truth and the seekers after a Spiritual Christianity, this fact—now that so many earnest inquirers are beginning to read the writings of the Swedish seer—will rather add to than detract from the interest and value of the work.

AMERICAN EDITOR.

PHILADELPHIA, Oct. 30, 1871.

## THE NEW ESCHATOLOGY.

*For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.—REV. xxi. 1.*

WHILE we blame the conduct of the Jews in adhering only to the literal sense of the Scriptures, and by such adherence rejecting their Messiah, we possibly forget that the Christian church has followed precisely the same line of conduct; and that to this we are indebted for the greater part of those absurd dogmas, which have so long exposed the Gospel to the derision of its enemies. Had men properly discriminated between those parts of the Sacred Volume which are *literally* true, and those which are only *apparently* so, we should never have heard of the doctrines of transubstantiation and Roman supremacy; nor of many other equally absurd beliefs which the generality of Christians entertain. We should not have seen a fallible and weak mortal exalted as Head over the church of God; we should not have heard of a morsel of bread being changed into the Lord's body; we should not have seen the Divine Nature divided among three separate and distinct Persons; nor should we have heard of the doctrine which we are about to bring under consideration.

But do not mistake me. When I assert that the Scriptures in the literal sense sometimes speak only apparent truth, I by no means deny the divine authority of the Sacred Record. The church whose doctrines I advocate, most explicitly declares that the *whole* of the Scriptures,—every chapter,—every verse,—every word, nay, sometimes every *letter*—is filled with the inbreathed wisdom of God. But when I say that apparent and not *real* truths are often laid down in the letter of the Word, I affirm what every man who possesses any share of discernment will readily admit. The fact itself is too plain even to require proof. Thus we read that the sun rises, moves, and sets; which is certainly true in *appearance*, but not in reality. Again we are told that the LORD repents,—that He is weary, and that He turns away His face from man; which, though correct as regards appearance, has no foundation in literal fact; for though the Sun of Righteousness is said to rise upon the soul, and to set when the mind is given up to evil, yet it is here as in the case of the *material* sun. In God "there is no variableness nor shadow of turning;"—"He fainteth not, neither is *weary*;"—"He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent;" but as the earth, by turning to or from the sun, causes the appearance of motion in that body; so the mind of man, by turning to the Lord, or by departing from Him, causes an appearance of change in God; yet it is not He that changes, but the mind itself.

And we may go still further. There are numerous passages in the Word of God, which in the literal sense only, do not convey even *apparent* truth. Among others the following, "Thou ridest through them with thine horses." "He rode upon a cherub and did fly; He came flying upon the wings of the wind." "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him;" "for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." "This (bread) is my body; this cup is the New Testament in my blood." "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." I am the Door of the sheep." "I am the true vine, and my Father is the Husbandman." In all these passages, and others which will occur to every reader of the Scripture, the literal sense conveys neither real nor apparent truth. The Lord does not really ride through the sea, nor does he even *appear* to do so. The flesh of the Saviour was not to be *literally* eaten. The bread which He held was not really his body, nor did it even *seem* to be so. And as in these and similar

instances, the outward letter of the Word conveys not its true meaning, it is to be sought for in the law of correspondence; or in that eternal connection which subsists between natural things and spiritual.

And upon this law of correspondence or analogy I must make a few preliminary remarks. It is what the world in general terms *figure*, or *metaphor*; but the New Church makes a distinction, and I will add, a very just one, betwixt *figure* (properly so called) and *correspondence*. Figurative language is that in which a comparison is drawn between one natural object and another; the analogy between which exists only in the imagination, and has, therefore, no *real* existence: but correspondence is the representation of spiritual things by natural; and the resemblance is not merely imaginary but real, consisting in the proper dependence of the latter upon the former, as an effect upon its cause. If we compare a mighty empire in its rise, glory, and decline, to an oak springing up, flourishing for centuries, and then decaying, we use *figurative* language; since both the empire and the oak are *natural* objects, which have no *real* connection with each other, and between which the resemblance is only imaginary. But when the Creator is likened to the sun, the language is no longer *figurative* but *correspondent*. It is not the comparison of earthly things with earthly, but of spiritual things with natural. And the objects compared have a real connection with each other, since the material sun depends on its Creator as an effect upon its cause. Again, when the church is described as the Lord's body, the language is correspondent and the connection real; for the rise and prosperity of the church depended upon the assumption of humanity by the Saviour; and it still hangs upon it as the cause of its existence.

We further notice that all passages of the Word, the historical as well as the poetical, bear within them such a correspondent or internal sense. This will be placed beyond a reasonable doubt if we consider, first, that "all Scripture," whether historical or prophetic, is, according to the Apostle, inspired or *God-breathed*. And as the breath of God is the infinitude of his love and wisdom, every portion of the sacred Volume must be filled with it. Not only every book in general, but every verse and every sentence;—for if we can find a single sentence which does not contain within itself the infinite wisdom of God, such sentence must either form no part of the Scripture, or the assertion of Paul must be untrue. And secondly, the Word of God from the beginning to the end is intended to "make us wise unto salvation." This is the design with which every part of it was written. But we can only become truly wise by being acquainted with our own state, and with the nature of the Divine Redeemer. Whatever part, therefore, does not relate both to God and to ourselves, cannot communicate saving wisdom; and consequently, (if the Apostle be correct,) cannot form any portion of the Sacred Volume. Now, independently of the passages which we have before quoted, the greater part of what is called "the historical Word," consists, in its mere *outward form*, of the records of the Jewish nation, their wars, and their policy. The prophecies themselves in their literal and obvious meaning, refer to the rise and decline of earthly states, and to the mutation of earthly empires. Either, then, such records and prophecies must have an internal and correspondent meaning, relating to spiritual and divine things, or if they have not, they cannot be fitted to communicate saving wisdom, and so cannot be accounted part of the Scriptures; seeing that the *Scriptures* in every part, are, according to Paul, filled with this wisdom.[\[1\]](#)

If, then, there *are* parts of the Word of God, the true meaning of which is not to be found in the literal sense; if that Word contains, within the outward letter, a spiritual and internal meaning; and if we are to resort to such meaning where the letter gives not the true one; the next inquiry which arises is, How are we to determine when a passage is true in the literal sense, or when it is only true in the corresponding one? The answer is easy. When the outward meaning of any passage asserts something at variance with reason,—or when it appears opposed to the known character of God, then such meaning must be abandoned, and the truth sought in the internal sense. This answer has been admitted as correct by the

Protestant churches, in their contest with their Catholic neighbors. The latter argue that the words of our Lord, "This is my body," are to be literally understood; while the former very justly answer that, since such an interpretation is opposed to reason and at variance with the nature of God as a God of truth, it ought to be and must be rejected; and the words considered as *figurative*, or as I have already termed it, *correspondent*.

I have now proved a few preliminary points: *First*, that there are some portions of the Word of God, the true meaning of which is not to be found in the letter. *Second*, that when the literal sense of a passage is opposed to fact and reason, such literal sense is to be rejected. And *third*, that in such cases the interpretation must be sought in the correspondent or figurative meaning.

We turn now to what is commonly denominated "the End of the World;" and on stating the generally received doctrine on this subject, we shall quote the words of the celebrated John Wesley, both on account of his piety and learning, and because the views which he maintains may be fairly taken as those of the generality of Christians. First he observes:

"There shall be earthquakes, not in divers places only, but in *all places*; not in one part only, but in every part of the habitable world. In one of these every island shall flee away, and the mountains will not be found. Meanwhile all the waters of the terraqueous globe will feel the violence of these concussions. The sea and the waves roaring, with such an agitation as had never been known before since the hour that 'the fountains of the great deep were broken up' to destroy the earth, which then stood 'out of the water and in the water!' The air will be all storm and tempest, full of dark vapors, and pillars of smoke resounding with thunder from pole to pole, and torn with ten thousand lightnings. But the commotion will not stop in the region of the air: the powers of heaven also shall be shaken. 'There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars;' those fixed as well as those that move round them. 'The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.' 'The stars shall withdraw their shining,' yea, and 'fall from heaven,' being thrown out of their orbits. And then shall be heard the universal *shout* from all the companies of heaven, followed by the *voice of the archangel*, proclaiming the approach of the Son of God and man; and the *trumpet of God* sounding an alarm to all that sleep in the dust of the earth. In consequence of this, all the graves shall open and the bodies of men arise."

After the following judgment, (which Mr. Wesley thinks must last several thousand years, considering "the number of persons who are to be judged, and of actions which are to be inquired into,") he proceeds:

"Then the heavens will be shriveled up as a parchment scroll, and pass away with a great noise. The very manner of their passing away is disclosed to us by the apostle Peter, 'In the day of God, the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved.' The whole beautiful fabric will be overthrown by that raging element, the connexion of all its parts destroyed, and every atom torn asunder from the others. 'By the same the earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up;' the enormous work of nature, the everlasting hills, mountains that have defied the rage of time, and stood unmoved so many thousand years, will sink down in fiery ruin. How much less will the works of art, though of the most durable kind, the utmost efforts of human industry, tombs, pillars, triumphal arches, castles, pyramids, be able to withstand the flaming Conqueror! All, all will die, perish, vanish away, like a dream when one awaketh."<sup>[2]</sup>

Such, in substance, is the doctrine of the Christian world; and certainly if *fear* and *terror* were sufficient to drive men into a state of righteousness, here are horrors enough to excite the fears even of the most courageous. But not the eloquence of man any more than his wrath, worketh the righteousness of



God. It is not sufficient that a doctrine be eloquently set forth; it must also have truth for its foundation. It is not enough that Scripture be quoted to support it; that Scripture must also stand in its proper connexion, and retain its proper meaning; for if this be not the case, however eloquent the preacher and however numerous the apparent proofs, the tenet can only rank with that "wood, hay, and stubble,"—those unsubstantial and airy doctrines, which, when tried by the fire of Divine Wisdom, are consumed and pass away. And if we can prove, *First*, That the passages which are quoted to support the doctrine before us, are *literally* understood, while nevertheless such literal sense leads to absurdity; *Second*, If we can further make it appear that such a *literal* application of them makes them inconsistent with each other as well as with many plain portions of the Bible; and again, that, even if we admit such outward meaning to be correct, it gives no countenance to the doctrine in dispute; while at the same time that doctrine is opposed to the end of creation and the character of God;—if these propositions can be made good, I trust it will appear, that the tenet itself has no countenance from the Scriptures; and that the true meaning of the passages adduced, must be sought for in the internal or spiritual sense of the Word.

The portions of Scripture on which the supposed destruction of the universe is founded, are far from numerous. Some of them are already quoted in the extract from Mr. Wesley; and previous to entering upon the consideration of our first proposition, we shall point out a few of the remainder. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, 31. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, until all be fulfilled." Matt. v. 18. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken from you, shall so come as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts i. 11. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father." 1 Cor. xv. 24. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God." 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." 2 Peter iii. 10.

But it is from the book of Revelation, that the principal part of the proofs are drawn. A book *confessedly* figurative in its language, and which the wisest and most learned men have in vain striven to interpret. One could hardly commit or imagine a greater outrage upon the common sense of mankind, than that which the defenders of this doctrine have committed, by first confessing the Book itself to be figurative and inexplicable, and then adducing its language *literally*, in their support, as if they had all at once found out that it was no longer figurative but *literal*. If the visions of the Apostle are not literal, but grand and representative images, then ought they not to be understood in a literal manner, or if they are to be so understood, then as plain and literal narrative they may be easily explained; and the complaint which the receivers of this doctrine have so often made, that it cannot be understood, is to the last degree frivolous and foolish.

And what makes the matter still worse is, that the passages they have adduced are among the most highly figurative in the Apostle's descriptions. The following are among them: "Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him; and they that pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth shall wail because of Him." i. 7. "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of

heaven fell unto the earth; even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind; and the heaven departed as a scroll, when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." vi. 12, 13, 14. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them: and I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God." xx. 11, 12. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea." xxi. 1.

Such are the texts of Scripture by which the doctrine before us is supported; the greater part of which have clearly no reference to the subject, and the remainder being not the literal language of narrative, but the *correspondent* and mysterious words of prophecy. Yet, even viewing them in their outward meaning, we can scarcely fail to be struck with the wide difference which exists between them and the description of Mr. Wesley. There is nothing in them of an earthquake, amidst some general concussion in which every island shall flee away:—nothing of "the air resounding with thunder from pole to pole, and being torn with ten thousand lightnings:"—nothing of the connexion of every part being destroyed, and every atom torn asunder from the others. We may therefore fairly set these down as additional horrors, supplied by the imagination of the writer, and unsupported by anything like Scripture proof. And with regard to what remains, we will now see how far that *literal* sense upon which it rests, will stand the criterion by which we are to determine the meaning of Scripture. If the outward meaning is reasonable and consistent, then it must be adhered to, and the doctrine is established: but if, on the other hand, such interpretation leads to absurdity, then, by the consent of every Protestant church, that meaning must be laid aside; and with it, too, must be cast off the tenet of this world's destruction.

But one cautionary remark must here be made. We are by no means authorized to mingle together literal and figurative language. That is, we have no right to interpret one part of a sentence literally, and another as figure. The passages before us are either *literal*, or they are *not*. If they *are*, then every part of them must be literally understood; if they are *not*, then no part of them can be literally interpreted. If, then, we adhere to the outward meaning, we must carry that adherence to every portion of the text; for if we reject such meaning in any part, we reject it in the whole; and the doctrine which depends for support upon it, must fall to the ground.

Keeping this in view our first proposition is, that, to affix a literal sense to the passages before us, is to give them a meaning at once absurd and unreasonable. We might in proof of this, go through every word in every text. It is declared in the letter that "the Lord shall *descend* from heaven;" but heaven is not a place connected either by height or distance with the material world. Could we rise far into the regions of space, and ascend for ever in the oceans of worlds, still, as regards *distance*, we should be no nearer heaven than before. Where God manifests Himself in the fullness of his love, there is heaven; but God being a Spirit, can only manifest Himself thus in a spiritual region; and such a region has no relation of space or distance with a world of matter. Hence, therefore, a descent from heaven is not a literal going down from a higher place to one beneath, and consequently must not be *literally* understood. Here the literal meaning fails at the very threshold. At the first step we are obliged to seek for a figurative or spiritual sense.

If we overcome *this* difficulty, we have yet to encounter others. It is further said that He shall descend with "a trumpet." Now modern Christians ridicule the idea of visible habitations and outward objects in the spiritual world. What then are we to make of the description before us,—of this *trumpet* with which the Lord is to descend? Is it *material*, or is it *not*? If it is material, then heaven, in which there are material objects, must be a material *place*; and the Being who uses this material trumpet, must be a

material Being; consequently, we must materialize both heaven and its inhabitants. But if this trumpet is not a *material* one, then let the defenders of the literal meaning tell us what is a spiritual trumpet? Whatever may be the answer, one thing is certain,—that which is spiritual is *internal*; and if by the words before us we are not to understand a literal trumpet, but something spiritual signified by it, then the literal meaning of the passage is not and cannot be the true one.

It is further declared that "The Lord shall come in the clouds of heaven." The question again arises: What are we to understand by these? The clouds literally mean those masses of vapor, which, arising from the earth, are condensed and become visible in the atmosphere; and which surround the earth at the distance of a few miles. If we keep to the literal sense of the passage, these must be understood. But is it in these that the Lord is to descend? Is six or eight miles above the surface of the globe, heaven? Or can bodies which seldom rise beyond this elevation, be properly called the clouds of heaven? Or is this the glory with which the Lord is to be invested—the vapors which rise from the material globe?

But this is not all. With Him the angels are also to descend. Now the nature of angels is not material; they exist not in space, nor are they included in its boundaries. How, then, we again ask, are spiritual beings to descend in a *material* vapor? It would degrade the subject to carry these questions further; but every person's discernment will enable him to perceive that by no means can the *literal* clouds be understood; and that these words must, like the former, be acknowledged as *figurative*. Here, therefore, at the very commencement we are obliged to *spiritualize* both the *descent*, the *trumpet*, and the *clouds*. Do what we will, the literal sense is absurd. And if we are forced to allow that *part* of the description cannot be literally understood, it is fair to conclude that the remainder has also an *internal* meaning.

We shall soon perceive further proof of this. After it is declared that the Lord shall come "in the clouds of heaven," it is added, as a necessary consequence, "and then shall *all the tribes of the earth* mourn, when they *see* the Son of Man coming in the clouds." In agreement with this are the words of John, "Behold, He cometh *with clouds*; and *every eye* shall see Him." If this be understood of an event which is literally to take place, we must again believe an impossibility. This world is a *round* body; and that which is visible to the inhabitants of one hemisphere, must be invisible to the dwellers on the other. Those who live upon one part of its surface cannot, by any possibility, see what is above the opposite part. This is a circumstance of daily experience:—at twelve o'clock at midnight the sun is visible to the inhabitants of the other side of this earth, and with them it is noon-day; but at that hour it is invisible to us; nor can we, by any possible means, obtain a sight of it. If, then, it be true that an object visible on one side of a globe, is invisible on the opposite, we inquire, In what situation must the Lord appear, that He may be seen at one and the same moment from *every part* of a round body? Where, or in what part of the atmosphere must He be placed that *all the tribes of the earth*, (those on its *opposite sides*,) may behold Him at the same time? Such a position is not only difficult, but absolutely impossible, unless the figure of the globe were changed; and to believe that such will be the manner of our Lord's coming, is to involve ourselves in a labyrinth of absurdities.

Aware of this difficulty, the writer whom I have already quoted supposes that the inhabitants of this earth will be caught up in the air, and *thus* be enabled to behold our Lord's descent. "Perhaps," says he, "it is more agreeable to our Lord's own account of his coming in the clouds, to suppose it will be above the earth, if not 'twice a planetary height;' and this supposition is not a little favored by what St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, 'The dead in Christ shall rise first.' Then we who remain alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So that it seems most probable, the 'great white throne' will be exalted high above the earth." Such a method of explanation only shows the

difficulties into which the mere literal sense has thrown its followers. Independent of the total absence of all Scripture proof of these ideas, it may be remarked that, "twice a planetary height," that is, twice the distance of the farthest planet from the earth, is not the place of clouds; in such case, therefore, the Lord would not come *in* the clouds, but far *above* them. Nor could He be said to descend *from* heaven; for as heaven, in the literal sense, is the starry region, if He remained stationary in that region, it would not be a descent *from* heaven, but a descent *in* heaven. And besides, as the clouds, literally, are the vapors surrounding the earth, by interpreting them to mean "twice a planetary height," the literal sense is given up; and if this be rejected, the doctrine before us is overthrown.

Once more we turn to the texts. Another event which is said to accompany the coming of the Lord, is the falling of the stars from heaven to the earth. "The stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken." "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind." When, in disputing with the Romish church, we contend that the Lord's words are not to be understood *literally*, we think it sufficient to prove, that so understood they involve an absurdity. But fully as great an absurdity is involved in the literal interpretation of the words before us. The stars, though to us they appear but as shining atoms, are proved beyond the possibility of doubt, to be equal to our sun both in size and splendor. Each one of them is, in fact, a *sun*, as large and as brilliant as that which enlightens our day. Now the sun exceeds our earth nearly ten hundred thousand times in magnitude; *each* star, therefore, may be reasonably supposed to exceed the size of this globe nearly a million times. As well, then, may we talk of ten thousand worlds falling upon an atom, as of ten thousand suns, each of them a million times larger than the globe, falling upon this grain of earth: it is in itself as impossible as for a piece of bread to become the body of the Lord.

But further; the *number* of these bodies is beyond the power of human calculation. Millions sink into nothing in computing it,—*thousands* of millions are nothing. Every part of the vault of heaven contains myriads; and clusters of them have been observed which contain, within themselves, myriads more. Could we penetrate into the depths of space, as far as the eye could see—as far as thought could penetrate, we should find suns and worlds till the mind was lost in the idea of their multitude: and though we continued to move onward for ages, we should still find ourselves but on the threshold of creation. These are not the visions of speculation, but the facts of philosophy;—truths which actual observation has placed beyond a doubt. Such are, literally, the stars of heaven: myriads of myriads of suns, surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand worlds. And let the common sense of mankind decide, whether all these can fall upon the surface of a globe not equal to the smallest of them in magnitude.

But we have not yet done with this subject. Let us imagine it possible that these innumerable and enormous bodies *were* thrown out of their stations, and by the hand of God launched towards our little world. What would result if they only came within a short distance of it? (to say nothing of their falling upon its surface.) It is well known to all who are acquainted with philosophy, that each of the heavenly bodies possesses a power called attraction, by which it draws towards itself any smaller body that comes within its sphere. So powerful is this attractive force that the sun alone draws all the worlds which move around it, and keeps them from flying off, though some are at the distance of eighteen hundred millions of miles! Each of the stars being of the same nature with our sun, possesses equally this attracting power. And were only a few of these bodies to be brought within a certain distance of the earth, the force of their combined attraction acting in contrary directions, would explode and scatter abroad, not only this earth but every earth in the system: and long before they could fall upon its surface, there would be no world for them to fall upon; it would be dissolved, and its atoms scattered through the universe.

Again, the Apostle Peter declares that "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and *the elements* shall *melt* with fervent heat." A question, therefore, once more arises, what is meant by "the elements?" Literally, they signify the most simple forms of matter, fire, air, earth, and water. But how can these melt, or be melted?—Can *fire* melt with fervent heat? It may be dispersed in its pure form, that of heat or caloric; but it is incapable of being melted. Can air, then, melt? It may be expanded, but it will not *melt*, in the literal meaning of the word. Can water melt? It may be raised in steam, and made to fly off in vapor: it may, by the application of heat, be resolved into air, its first principle; but it will not melt. There is, therefore, only one element out of the four which is capable of being literally melted; *earth may*, indeed, be vitrified, and rendered fluid. But how can *one element* be denominated *the elements*? And besides, the apostle seems to exclude the *earth* from the elements which are thus to melt; for he mentions *its* destruction, as subsequent to that of the elements. "The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the *earth also*", that is, in addition to these, the earth and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.<sup>[3]</sup> Here again, the literal sense fails. We must either allow what is not true, namely, that *fire, air, and water*, can be melted by fire, or seek for an internal and figurative meaning.

I might pass thus through the whole of the language on which this tenet is founded; and it would be easy to show that the circumstances are as impossible in their literal meaning, as that a man should eat "the flesh of his own arm," or that our Lord should literally be a *vine* and a *door*.

The very advocates of the doctrine are convinced of this. Hence they have framed various and contradictory systems to explain the above descriptions. One has asserted that the earth will at that period *be rolled out* of her orbit, and that this motion will cause an appearance as if the heavens passed away. Another has enveloped the world in a thick mist, by which the light of the moon, being changed, will appear of a red color. A third has appointed a comet, which in its passage to or from the sun, will approach this earth and involve it in flames. All have seen the difficulties, and all have attempted to overcome them by explanations; yet, after all, the task remains as arduous as ever. If we will, in despite of reason, found a doctrine on the literal meaning of the texts, we must adhere to that meaning; for to depart from it, is to confess its insufficiency: and if, on the other hand, we resolve to reject the literal sense in *one part*, we then acknowledge that it is not the true one, and that another must be sought for. If we are obliged to give up a literal falling of stars to the earth, and a literal appearance in the clouds of the air, then we must give up also, a literal burning and destruction of the universe; for if one part of the sentence is to be understood figuratively, so is the other.

And that such destruction is a spiritual event, and not a natural one, will appear still further from the following observation. When two prophecies are found, couched in the same language, and nearly in the same words, one of which prophecies has been fulfilled, while the other yet remains to be accomplished; the manner in which the latter will be fulfilled must be determined by the previous fulfillment of the former.

Now it is a fact, although very seldom noticed, that the prophecies relating to the *first* coming of the Lord, are expressed in the very same language with those which relate to his second appearance. We need only turn to the writings of the prophets to be convinced of this. "Behold," says Malachi, "the day cometh that shall *burn as an oven*, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith JEHOVAH OF HOSTS. And, behold, I send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the *great and terrible day* of the Lord." iv. 1, 5. Again, Isaiah: "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and all their host shall fall down as a falling fig from the fig-tree."<sup>[4]</sup> Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in

blood; but this shall be with *burning* and *fuel of fire*. For unto us a child is born." ix. 5. "Upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days I will pour out my spirit; and I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, *blood*, and *fire*, and vapor of smoke. *The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood* before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." Joel ii. 29-31.

This latter prophecy is expressly applied by Peter to the commencement of Christianity. In defending his brethren from the charge of imposture brought against them by the Jews on the day of Pentecost, he declares, "This (the extraordinary inspiration of the spirit) is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood." Acts ii. 16-20.

Once more, the prophet Haggai, speaking of the same period declares, "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts. Yet once it is a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house (the latter temple) with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts." Again, the prophet Joel before quoted, says, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the *day of the Lord* is near in the valley of decision. *The sun and the moon shall be darkened*, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of his people. So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain. Then shall Jerusalem be holy." iii. 14-17. "But who (says Malachi,) may abide the day of His coming, or who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's *fire* and like fullers' soap." And to conclude this magnificent imagery, Isaiah declares, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered nor come to mind;—they shall not hunger, nor thirst, neither shall the heat of the sun smite them; but He that hath mercy upon them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them."

With such descriptions of the first Advent of the Messiah do the prophets abound. Let any one peruse with attention the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Joel, Haggai, and Malachi, and he will be convinced of the truth of this remark. We will now notice the agreement which exists between these prophecies relating to his first appearance, and those which refer to his second coming. Both periods are called "*the day of the Lord*;" and both are ushered in by "darkness and gloominess." In both it is said that "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood;" and in both "the heavens and the earth" are said to "pass away." In both of them the Lord is declared to come "*in fire*," and the conclusion of both is "a new heaven and a new earth."

Now *one* of these periods is past. The first Advent of the Saviour to which the above prophecies refer, is accomplished. And how were these predictions fulfilled? Did the events *literally* take place? Let history answer. Though the heavens and the earth were to be shaken and pass away, yet no commotion took place in the visible parts of nature. The seasons ran their wonted course; the sun gave forth his usual light; and the earth pursued without intermission her annual journey. Though the moon was to be "turned into blood," yet no such disaster befell the visible planet; her light shone as bright as ever. One solitary meteor alone over the plains of Judea, announced to the Eastern sages the coming of the Saviour. Though his approach was to be *in fire*, yet no material flames accompanied his Advent. The fire of Divine Love alone distinguished Him. Not one of all these predictions had anything resembling a literal accomplishment. And now let us look to the conclusion. If, when two prophecies are given, couched in the same language, one of which is fulfilled while the other remains to be accomplished, the interpretation of the second is to be judged of by the fulfillment of the first, the following argument at once arises: Since

the prophecies relating to the first Advent of the Saviour are expressed by the very same terms, and represented by the very same images as those which refer to his *second* coming, the meaning of these latter must be similar to that of the others. And since not one of *those* prophecies ever received a literal fulfillment, so neither are we to expect a literal fulfillment of those before us. In a word, since the events predicted at the Lord's *first* coming were not natural, but representative images of spiritual things—of states of the world and of the church; so those foreshadowing his second coming are representative of similar things, belonging to the minds of men, and will never receive a *literal* accomplishment.

If, however, it be still maintained in opposition to this remark, that they *must* be understood literally, I will ask one question. Since the words of the *Old* Testament which describe the first appearance of the Redeemer, are exactly similar to those of the *New* which predict his second coming; how is it that the former never received a literal fulfillment? If it be replied, that this was figurative language, while the latter is literal description; I again inquire, By what authority or according to what rule is this distinction made? Why is the first to be resolved into figure, while the latter is considered as literally true? Such distinction between the two cannot arise from the *language*; this is almost word for word the same. It cannot be made because the literal sense is in one case *reasonable*, while in the other it is not; for in both cases it involves numerous absurdities. It cannot be because the one is prophecy and the other narrative; for both are the language of prophetic declaration. On what authority, then, is the literal meaning of the first *rejected*, while in the other it is retained and believed? Why are not both to be understood alike, since in both the descriptions are similar? There is no rule by which a distinction can be drawn.

I have now gone over the first proposition, and have proved that a literal interpretation of the passages adduced involves absurdities as great as that of transubstantiation; and that the absence of all literal fulfillment in the case of other prophecies exactly similar, affords the strongest reason to expect that in *this* instance no literal accomplishment will take place. That the language itself is that of *correspondence*,—the representation of spiritual things by natural; and as such it will receive a spiritual and not a natural fulfillment.

2. We now pass to the second point, namely that the texts supposed to refer to the destruction of the material world are inconsistent with each other; and are opposed to other clear and express declarations of Scripture. In this case as in the former, we shall note the words in the debated texts. In the passages brought forward to support the doctrine, there are four ways mentioned in which the destruction of the heavens (or visible starry firmament) is hereafter to take place. First, in one passage of the Revelation, they are described as being "rolled away as a scroll;" in another the stars are said to "fall from heaven to the earth." In Peter's Epistle it is declared that they shall "pass away with a great noise;" and in another place the same apostle says that "the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved." Now these four descriptions considered literally, contradict and destroy each other. To dissolve is to separate into particles, and to return to their first elements. But if the starry heavens are *thus* to be destroyed, then they can neither fall to the earth nor be rolled together as a scroll; for that which is dissolved and reduced to its first elements, can be destroyed no further except by annihilation. And if the heavenly bodies are to be *thus* dissolved, then no other kind of dissolution can affect them. Again, if we take the other passage, "they were rolled away as a scroll," we are placed in precisely the same dilemma. By their being rolled away as a scroll, we must then understand that they will be driven from their stations, thrown into confusion, and hurried afar into the depths of space. But if they are thus rolled away they cannot possibly "fall to the earth," for the two events stand in direct opposition; in the first instance they must be hurled into space, far beyond the earth's orbit; in the latter they must absolutely fall upon her surface. And now we ask, Are the stars to be rolled away, or are they to fall upon the earth? The literal sense of the

Scripture mentions both events; but if one occurs, the other (consistently with the text) can never take place.

Suppose, however, we admit for the sake of argument, that the rolling away of the heavens is an event separate from the destruction of the stars. We again inquire whether this event will take place *before* such destruction, or *after* it. If *before* it, we come to the former conclusion; for then the stars must fly off with the heaven in which they are fixed. If *after* it, then, as there will be nothing but *empty space* remaining, we ask how such empty space can be called *the heavens*; and how empty *space* without a single visible object, can be rolled away as a scroll!" In this instance, therefore, if we abide by the literal sense of one passage, we must of necessity reject that of the others.

But it is further said that all these events are to take place *previous* to the appearance of the Son of Man. "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then (immediately following these events) shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." Now this prior commotion includes the dissolution of all the elements, "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." Among the number of the elements, *the air* will of course be destroyed, for it is included among them; and with the air those *clouds* which depend upon it for their existence and visibility. Yet, after this, when the clouds have ceased to be, and when the heavens are no more, the Son of Man is to appear in these very clouds and in the midst of this heaven! Here, again, is an inconsistency in the literal sense of the passage. If the heavens, and with them the clouds are dissolved, then it is impossible that anything can appear *in* what has ceased to have an existence. Or if the Son of Man *is* to appear in the clouds, then the heavens cannot be destroyed previous to that appearance. Which way soever we turn we are met by a difficulty. If we receive one of the passages in the literal sense, we must either reject or spiritualize the other.

Again: at the time of our Lord's ascension, the two angels who appeared to the disciples declared, "this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall *so come in like manner*, as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts i. 11. It would therefore appear that, if these angelic messengers are worthy of credit, the *descent* of our Lord is to be exactly similar in circumstance to his ascent. Now, in his ascension into heaven, there are several things which require notice. 1st: It was *private*. He led his disciples from the city to the Mount of Olives. 2d: It was seen by none but his followers. The generality of the Jewish nations did not even know that such an event had taken place; they considered our Lord as a dead man; and hence when they accused Paul before Festus, one part of that accusation was that he affirmed one Jesus to be alive, who was (in their opinion) dead. Acts xxv. 19. 3d: His ascension was a *solitary* one. There is no account whatever that any persons were *seen* ascending with Him:—"He was taken up; and a cloud received *Him* out of their sight." And, 4th: It was *unattended by any outward pomp*. The Jews knew nothing of it;—there was no alteration in the visible world; and even those who witnessed the event, beheld nothing save a bright cloud into which he passed and disappeared. The ascension of the Saviour was therefore to the world a *private* occurrence, so far as privacy consists in general ignorance respecting it. It was seen by none but his disciples; it was without pomp or show. Of those who afterwards heard of it, numbers gave no credit to the story. And the only visible proof that it had taken place, was the effect which followed—the extraordinary out-pouring of the divine influence.

And if we keep to the literal sense of the words, *this* is to be his descent from heaven: He is to come *in like manner* as He went up. If, then, this be the case, then such descent will be an occurrence unknown to the generality of mankind, or only known by its following effects. It will be unaccompanied by any



destruction, and even by any commotion in the realm of material nature. And many of those who hear of it may be expected to deny it, according to his own words: "When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?"

Such, according to the passage before us must be the manner of his Second Coming: but let us, if we can, reconcile this with the former descriptions. In the one case all nature is to be *destroyed*; in the other it is to remain unshaken. In the former instance He is said to descend with thousands of angels; in the latter, to come unattended. By the first description, He is to be seen visibly by all; in the second, He will be invisible to all except his followers. The two accounts thus stand in direct contradiction to each other. If He comes again in the same "manner" that He ascended, then the former passages cannot be literally understood: or if He comes literally in the manner they describe, the passage before us cannot be true.

I might here, as in the former case, go through every passage, and show that each of them contains within itself accounts which are inconsistent with those of the others: in one it is said that the Lord shall descend from heaven in flaming fire: in another, in the clouds: in a third, on a great white throne. In one it is declared that, before his face the earth and the heaven shall flee away, and their place be no more found: in a second, that *after* His coming the departed shall rise from the earth, and the grave and the sea give up their dead; consequently, if the latter part be true, the earth will not pass away at the time of His descent. In the whole there are inconsistencies which science, according to the literal meaning, may disguise, but can never reconcile.

We now turn to the consideration of other passages which, taken even in their literal sense, militate strongly against the doctrine in dispute. After the destruction of the antediluvian earth by the flood, Jehovah affirmed, "I will not *again curse the ground any more*, though the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done." This *curse* which the Lord is here inferred to have pronounced upon the former world, in whatever sense the terms be taken, was accomplished in its destruction; and the end of that world by a flood of waters, completed its fulfillment. The curse of the Lord, therefore, when pronounced upon the earth, leads to its dissolution. But God Himself affirms that He will not thus curse the ground any more,—that He will not again suffer it to be destroyed, neither will He again smite everything living. The declaration is absolute. It is not said that He will refrain from it during a *limited period*, but that He will not do it *any more*—to all eternity. Yet if the commonly received doctrine be correct, this declaration of Jehovah must be untrue. If *again* everything living *is* to be smitten,—if again the earth is to be cursed with destruction as complete, if not more so than the former one; then it cannot be true that every living thing is *not* again to be smitten, nor the earth again to be cursed. In this instance the literal proofs clash with the solemn declaration of God.

If, however, it be objected that these words refer not so much to the *destruction* of the globe, as to the *mode* of that event, I reply that no such qualifying language is found in the text. The words are general; they are not "I will not again curse the earth *with water*," but I will not curse the ground,—I will not destroy the earth "*any more*," either in this way or in any other. "I will not smite any more everything living as I have now done," by an universal destruction. And, in fact, the promise that a *flood* should no more destroy the world, would have afforded little consolation to Noah, had he understood that another destruction more awful than the former, was approaching, in which not this world only, but the whole universe would perish; and when not the greater part, but *all* things living, would be destroyed, without the preservation even of a remnant. The flood is certainly in the following chapter referred to particularly as the more recent danger, and a repetition of which would be most dreaded by the survivors; but the very same declaration of Jehovah, which interdicts a flood of waters, equally interdicts any other entire

destruction:—"I will not in any way curse the ground any more."

There is another subject upon which I must touch, but very briefly, since the arguments arising out of it might be carried to a length far exceeding my prescribed limits. The prophetic writings abound with descriptions of what is called "the kingdom of David:"—a kingdom which was to arise in the latter day, and upon which every blessing of heaven was to descend. "In those days," says the prophet Amos, "I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." ix. "And in the days of these kings (that is, literally, in the latter times of the Roman power,) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; but it shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Dan. ii. 44. Again, the same prophet: "I saw in the night visions, and behold one like unto the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed." That these descriptions refer to the Redeemer, is evident. Isaiah when predicting his approach, and the establishment of his kingdom, says, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." ix. 7.

Now the question is, to what authority or kingdom do these predictions refer? That it is not to the general government of God, is clear,—this had existed from eternity; but the dominion spoken of, was to commence at a definite period of time,—"*at that time,*" and "*in the days of those kings.*" The general subjection of all things to the Divine Being, is also something arising out of his very nature, and is neither given nor acquired; but this was something to be acquired. "The Lord God shall *give* unto him the throne of his father David:"—"The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom." Nor can it refer to the kingdom of the just in glory, for the descriptions are such as can only apply to the state of men on earth. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." Isa. xl. 11. "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David." If, therefore, this kingdom be neither the general dominion over all, nor the state of the righteous in eternity, it can only relate to the kingdom of the church on earth. And that it does so, is plain from the very terms used. David is, by almost all professed Christians, acknowledged to have been a type and representative of the Messiah; and the Jewish nation over whom he reigned, most certainly prefigured the Christian church: the throne of David is therefore the authority of the Lord in his church on earth, and his kingdom is that church itself. Now this kingdom and this throne,—this church and authority *are everlasting*; they shall "*never be destroyed*;" they shall "*not pass away*;" they shall "*stand for ever*." But if *the earth* on which this church exists, is hereafter to dissolve and pass away, the kingdom must pass away with it. For though it is true that the just in heaven would still constitute a kingdom of the Lord, yet that kingdom would no longer be "*the kingdom of David*." The very declaration that the kingdom of the Lord *on earth* will *never be destroyed*, supposes as a necessary consequence, that the earth on which it is erected will also continue to exist.

In agreement with this are the words heard by John; "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 for *ever and ever*." Rev. xi. 15. And over what is He thus to reign? Most certainly over the kingdoms which He is here said to have obtained—the kingdoms of *this world*; and over these He is to reign "*for ever and ever*." But how is He to reign for ever over the kingdoms of the world, if the world and its kingdoms are

to be destroyed? Whenever the earth is dissolved, the kingdoms of the world will be no more; and he cannot reign over that which has no existence! If, then, the world and its kingdoms are to be destroyed, He can never reign *for ever* over them: or if He will thus reign for ever over the kingdoms of the world, then those kingdoms must exist for ever; and if the *kingdoms* exist for ever, *the world* on which they are founded must exist for ever with them.

And exactly in accordance with this assertion are the words of the Psalmist: "He (the Lord) built his sanctuary in high places, like *the earth* which He hath established *for ever*." And those of Solomon:—"One generation passeth away, and another cometh, *but the earth abideth for ever*." The same is declared of the heavens: "His name shall endure *for ever*; His name shall be continued *as long as the sun*." Psalm lxxii. 17. "His seed shall endure *for ever*, and his throne *as the sun* before me; it shall be *established for ever as the moon*, and as a faithful witness in heaven." lxxxix. 36.

Nothing can be more directly opposed to the common opinion than these explicit declarations of the Bible. It is certain that these passages refer to the visible earth and to the material heaven; and these it is expressly declared are to continue not for a limited time, but for ever: while in the passages adduced to prove the opposite, we are left to struggle among difficulties, without any certainty that the visible earth is at all intended, since even those commentators who believe the tenet are compelled, in most instances, to abandon the proofs of it.

I have now established, as far as is necessary, my second proposition. I have shown that the literal sense of the passages brought forward to confirm the doctrine of the earth's destruction, are inconsistent with each other, as well as with other parts of the Sacred Volume; and therefore, that such literal meaning cannot be the true one. I have shown that the words of Jehovah assert that the world shall not be smitten any more. I have further shown that the duration of the kingdom of God, runs parallel with that of the visible world, and that therefore both must endure for ever. And lastly, that the sacred writers declare in explicit language the endless duration both of the earth and the heavens.

3. I now proceed to consider the third part of the subject: that the passages brought forward, when taken in their proper connexion, give no countenance to the popular doctrine, but on the contrary, afford evident proofs that they have no reference to it. In doing this, I shall adduce them one by one in the order they are laid down. And first, the passage in the Gospel of Matthew: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn when they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

I have already noticed the inconsistencies which arise from adopting the literal meaning of the passage; and I now remark further, that in their literal and obvious application, the words refer not to any destruction of the world in general, but to the approaching overthrow of the Jewish nation and polity. I admit that they have a spiritual reference to the state of the Christian church of which the Jews were a type; but of this we shall speak hereafter. It is with the literal meaning we have now to do, since on the literal meaning the doctrine is founded.<sup>[5]</sup>

Our Lord had been addressing the multitude in the temple; and in that address He had solemnly warned them of their approaching danger. On his departure, his followers pointed to its stately and magnificent buildings; and He again seized the opportunity to repeat to them the prediction of its final destruction. Naturally anxious to learn the fate of their country, and, perhaps, too uneasy on their own account, they

came to Him privately and asked, "When shall these things be?" and "what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the consummation of the age?"<sup>[6]</sup> —that is, the period of the Jewish government and religion. In reply, He delivered the splendid prophecy before us; first warning them against those pretenders to Messiahship, who, soon after His ascension, overrun the land of Judea; and then going on to describe the miseries which were coming upon the Jews, and the final overthrow of their temple and city;—He delivers to them this prediction, not in the common language of narrative, but, in the magnificent figures of the ancient prophecy. A method of speaking which, while it pointed out the mutation of earthly things, had a further reference to things spiritual. And thus while He pointed out the overthrow of the Jewish power, He referred likewise to the degraded state and corruption of the Christian church,—the spiritual Jerusalem,—when, having lost its love or charity, it sunk down into a state of formal observance as lifeless as the departed spirit of Judaism.

In neither of these senses, however, does the passage point to any destruction of the visible universe. If we take it in its outward reference to the Jewish nation, then the darkening of the sun and the withdrawing of the moon, together with the other parts of the description, can only be representative images of their multiplied distresses. This view of the subject is taken by most of those who have commented on the words. "The sun shall be darkened," "that is, (says one,) all their glory and excellency shall be eclipsed; all their wealth and prosperity shall be laid waste;—the whole government, civil and ecclesiastical, shall be destroyed; and such marks of misery found upon them, as never were seen upon a people."<sup>[7]</sup> But among the believers of the tenet in dispute, we presume there is not one more highly celebrated for learning than Dr. Adam Clarke; yet he, in commenting upon this passage, gives up all idea of a literal destruction. The following is the doctor's explanation:

"Immediately after the tribulation."—Commentators generally understand this and what follows, of the end of the world and Christ's coming to judgment. But the word *immediately* shows that our Lord is not speaking of any distant event, but of something immediately consequent on calamities already predicted; and that must be the destruction of Jerusalem. The *Jewish heaven* shall perish and *the sun* and *moon* of its glory and happiness shall be darkened,—brought to nothing. *The sun is the religion of the church; the moon the government of the state; and the stars are the judges and doctors of both.* In the prophetic language, great commotions upon earth are often represented under the notion of commotions and changes in the heavens. The fall of Babylon is thus represented by the constellations of heaven withdrawing their light, and the sun and the moon being darkened:—the destruction of Egypt by the heaven being covered, the sun enveloped with a cloud, and the moon withholding her light: the destruction of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, is represented by *casting down some of the host of heaven and the stars* to the ground. And this very destruction of Jerusalem is represented by the prophet Joel, by showing wonders in heaven and in earth,—*darkening the sun, and turning the moon into blood.* This general mode of describing these judgments, leaves no room to doubt the propriety of its application in the present case." (*Commentary on Matthew.*)

Thus, in the hands of one of the most learned advocates of the doctrine, does one of its principal proofs vanish into air. According to his showing, there is nothing in the whole passage referring at all either to the material earth, or the visible heavens; and the whole is a figurative account of the overthrow of the religion and government of the Jews,—"*the sun and moon of the Jewish heaven.*" We might follow the doctor through the whole chapter, and show that in almost every point he confirms what has been formerly advanced. "The sign of the Son of Man was, (he says,) the signal manifestation of Christ's power and glory," in the destruction of Jerusalem. The "angels sent forth to gather the elect, the apostles and their successors in the Christian ministry." The sound of a trumpet, "the earnest affectionate call of the Gospel:"

and "*the elect*," "the Gentiles who were now chosen or elected, in place of the rebellious obstinate Jews." In the same manner he explains the whole of this and the following chapter; and in the latter declares that the whole of the accounts up to the thirty-first verse, may be properly applied to the destruction of Jerusalem. And here we may leave him; for if there is nothing from the first verse of the twenty-fourth chapter, to the thirty-first verse of the twenty-fifth, which relates to the destruction of the world, surely nothing respecting it will be found in the remainder.

Thus does this passage, so often brought forward to add to the terror of the world's dissolution, which has been sounded forth from pulpits and re-echoed from the press, when calmly examined, prove to have no connexion with the subject: but to refer to an event as different from the general conflagration, as light from darkness.

But some may be ready to say, "Although it has not this reference in its outward meaning, yet you have already confessed that it relates to Christianity and the church; and is not the doctrine contained in this internal application?" I answer, no! The doctrine only stands upon the supposition that the heavens and the earth referred to in the passage, are the literal and visible portions of nature. We have seen that in its relation to the Jews, no such things are intended; still less, therefore, can it point to these in its *internal* meaning. As the sun and moon in the literal application are, (to use the words of Dr. Clarke,) "the sun and moon of the *Jewish* heaven" or state, so in spiritual reference, they are the sun and moon of the *Christian* heaven, or state of the church; and, as pointing to spiritual principles and spiritual states, have nothing to do with the outward machinery of nature. As no destruction of the world, then, can be found in the *internal* sense of the prophecy, it is confessed, even by the advocates of the doctrine, that there is nothing respecting it in the *outward* sense. And if nothing is found relating to it either in the *spiritual* or *literal* meaning of the words, then it is not there *at all*; and the passage as a proof of the dissolution of all things, must be abandoned for ever.<sup>[8]</sup>

The next passage which claims attention, is that in the sixth chapter of the Revelation; for the words in the first chapter being those of the apostle previous to his prophetic visions, may be classed among the apostolic passages of which we shall speak hereafter. The text before us reads: "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind: and the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." In this part of the subject I say nothing of the evidently figurative nature of the passage, nor of the absurdities before alluded to, as existing in the sense of the letter; but I shall make one remark obvious to the minds of all, and borne out by the connexion of the words themselves. The vision of the *seals* (as well as that of the vials,) is one continued prophecy, which is not concluded until the breaking of the seventh seal in the eighth chapter. Now the events above described, whether representative or literal, happen under the *sixth* seal; yet the descriptions of the *seventh* as well as those of the others, refer to events which were to occur in the church and on this visible earth. The sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand,—the prohibition of the wind to blow on the earth,—the seven trumpets and their consequences, evidently relate to states of the church in this world; yet all these things which were to be transacted in the visible world, happen *after* the description above quoted.

If, then, various and multiplied events are described as occurring *on the earth*, *after* the heavens had departed like a scroll, and the islands were moved out of their places, nothing can be more clear than that the destruction of the earth is not here alluded to; for if the world is to be destroyed under the *sixth* seal,

then no events can happen *upon it* under the *seventh*, since it will then have no existence; but as such events *are* described as passing *in the world* under the *seventh* seal, then that world cannot previously be destroyed under the *sixth* seal.

And in this opinion we are, as before, supported by the advocates of the doctrine themselves. The sealing of the tribes is almost universally acknowledged to signify the preservation of the church, under those heavy and forthcoming calamities represented by the effects of the seven trumpets. And as this preservation, and these calamities, occur *after* the darkening of the sun, and the falling of the stars, the latter event is generally supposed to prefigure (not the destruction of visible nature, but) some great change in the political or religious constitution of the world. The precise period to which this change is to be referred, has, however, divided the opinions of the learned. Some apply it altogether to the Jews, and suppose that their destruction in Judea and at Jerusalem was so dismal that it was represented to John as the darkening of the sun, and the moon looking like blood, and the stars falling. Others apply it to the overthrow of Paganism and the destruction of the heathen emperors; and accordingly by the earth quaking,—the sun becoming black,—the moon becoming blood, and the stars falling from heaven to earth, is to be understood the great changes that were made in the Roman empire by the overturning of the Pagan state. Others again apply it to "the great and horrible confusion of the Christian world under Antichrist, when Christ the Sun of Righteousness began to be obscured; that is, his doctrine darkened,—the moon or church turned into blood,—the stars or pastors fallen from heavenly offices, the Scriptures, like the heavens rolled up, forbidden to be read, the mountains, (king and princes) in jeopardy,—and the islands brought under Antichrist's yoke and tyranny." Very few venture to apply it to what is commonly called the "end of the world;" and none can do it without charging the apostle with inconsistency, by affirming that it shall take place at a definite period of time; and then speaking of events that are to occur in the world *after* that time, that is, after the world shall have been destroyed!



On this passage the commentator whom we have already quoted observes,

"A great earthquake," that is, "a most stupendous change in the civil and religious constitution of the world." "The *sun*"—the ancient Pagan government of the Roman empire, "*was totally darkened*"; and like a black hair sackcloth, was degraded and humbled to the dust. The *moon*—the ecclesiastical state of the same empire, *become as blood*, was totally ruined; their sacred rites abrogated; their priests and religious institutions desecrated; their altars cast down; their temples destroyed, or turned into places of Christian worship. The *stars of heaven*—the gods and goddesses, demi-gods and deified heroes, of their poetical and *mythological heaven*, prostrated indiscriminately, and lay as useless as the figs or fruit of a tree shaken down before ripe by a tempestuous wind. *And the heaven departed as a scroll*. The whole system of Pagan and idolatrous worship, with all its spiritual, secular, and superstitious influence, blasted, shriveled up, and rendered null and void as a parchment scroll when exposed to the action of a strong fire. And every mountain—all the props, supports, and dependencies of the empire; whether regal allies, tributary kings, dependent colonies, or mercenary troops, were all moved out of their places, so as to stand no longer in the same relation to that empire and its worship, support, and maintenance, as they formerly did. And *island*:—The heathen temples, with their precincts and inclosures, cut off from the common people, may be here represented by *islands*."<sup>[9]</sup>

Like the former passage, therefore, this is rendered nugatory as a proof of the dissolution of the universe; and rendered so, too, by the admission of its friends. As that referred to the *Jewish heaven* which passed away at the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, so this is affirmed to apply to the *mythological heaven* of the Pagans, which was dissolved at the conversion of Constantine to Christianity; and to have no allusion to the system of material nature. Here are two of the strongest passages thrown aside as useless in the controversy; and we shall quickly perceive that, when closely examined, the advocates of the doctrine equally cast off, if not the whole, at least the greater part, of the remainder.

Indeed, as I have already remarked, the connexion of the passage is such as will by no means admit of any literal burning of the earth; so that, even though its inapplicability to the subject had *not* been allowed, yet would the inconsistency attendant on such a meaning, have pleaded loudly for its rejection.

We pass now to consider the next proof, which occurs in the twentieth chapter of the same book: "And I saw a great white throne and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead small and great stand before God; and the books were opened," etc. In connection with this stands the first verse of the twenty-first chapter: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea."

Upon this passage we may repeat the remark which we applied to the foregoing: that the events which follow this descent of the Saviour, and which are stated as its consequences, are such as apply only to the church of God on earth; and that, therefore, the words before us cannot point to any dissolution of the universe. The immediate effects of the passing away of the heaven and the earth, are the formation of a new heaven and a new earth, and the descent of "the holy city New Jerusalem." This latter event the celebrated Dr. Hammond declares cannot refer to the state of glorified saints in heaven, but must signify some peculiar benefit bestowed upon the church on earth. The expression "descending out of heaven from God," at once determines its reference to a state of things below; and it no doubt relates to the restoration of Christianity to its primitive purity. In the very same manner does Dr. Clarke explain the passage, though he evidently betrays a wish to find within it a proof of the dissolution of all things. "The New Jerusalem,"

says he, "doubtless means the Christian church in a state of great prosperity and purity:" and alluding to the description given of her, he observes, that "it has been *most injudiciously* applied to *heaven*." If, then, the consequence of the passing away of the first heaven is to usher in (not eternal glory, but) a prosperous state of the church on earth, it must follow in course that such a passing away of the heavens must refer to a change and alteration in the church, and not in the natural world;—to the conclusion and departure of a state of darkness, and the commencement of a new state of light and affection. As the former *Jewish heaven* of types and shadows departed at the first coming of the SON OF GOD, and as the *mythological heaven of Paganism* was "shriveled up" at the triumph of the Gospel, so must the *modern Christian heaven* of ignorance and evil pass away at the Second Coming of the SON OF MAN; and to it will succeed a *new heaven* of purity and peace.

In this application of the passage, we are supported by the explanation of the above commentators. They agree in defining heaven and earth figuratively, to mean the state of the world and of the church;—of the Jewish world, when applied to the Jews;—of the Pagan world, when applied to the Heathen: and by the self-same mode of interpretation, we are justified in applying it to the *Christian world* in its reference to Christians. In no case can it be explained of the visible world of matter; for the passages being acknowledged to be figurative, it must, as in the other instances, bear the figurative meaning.

Having thus noticed the only two texts in the Revelations, which seem, in the least, to bear upon the subject, I may be allowed again to repeat my surprise, that persons should be found attempting to support a doctrine by the literal sense of this book. Those among the advocates of the popular belief, who have most carefully studied the prophecy, protest their ignorance of its meaning and application. "I cannot pretend to explain the book," says the writer above quoted; "I do not understand it. I repeat it, I do not understand the book; and I am satisfied, that not one who has written on the subject, knows anything more of it than myself."—"What the prophecies mean, and when and *how* they are to be fulfilled, God in heaven alone knows." It "is termed a *Revelation*; but it is a revelation of *symbols*;—an exhibition of *enigmas*, to which no particular solution is given; and to which God alone can give the solution." "To pretend to say, (observes Calmet,) what this new heaven and new earth mean, and what are their ornaments and qualities, is, in my opinion, the greatest of all presumptions." Yet, into this presumption do the generality of Christians fall, who, amidst this candid confession of learned ignorance, bring forth with the greatest confidence the literal sense of the book, to support a doctrine which length of time has seemed to render sacred.

The words of the apostles now demand our attention; and with respect to these we notice a fact which is necessary to the proper understanding of their ideas; that is, that the apostles were themselves ignorant both of the time when, and the manner how, the second coming of the Lord would be accomplished; and that they have, therefore, when speaking upon this subject, carefully abstained from giving any opinion of their own, confining themselves entirely to the words of the Saviour, or paraphrasing them without altering the symbolic images.

This circumstance in no degree detracts from that extraordinary illumination with which the apostles were endowed. They were men raised up by God, and filled with the Divine influence, in order that they might propagate in the world, and among all nations, the religion of Christ; but it does not appear that among the supernatural gifts which they received, the gift of *prophecy* was included, except in the case of the apostle John. Yet, even if we allow, for the sake of argument, that they did *possess* this gift, it would by no means follow that they perfectly understood their own predictions. It is the peculiar nature of prophecy, that its proper meaning is not known until the time of its fulfillment; and this was especially the



case with the Jewish writers who foretold the first advent of the Saviour. Although their predictions seem now so clear and strong, yet both the prophets themselves and their followers, were at the time ignorant of their precise meaning; and hence arose the absurd notions which the Jews entertained of a temporal salvation and an earthly Saviour. The gift of prophecy was, therefore, except in very rare instances, accompanied by entire ignorance of the manner of its fulfillment. It does not, however, appear that this gift was bestowed in general upon the apostles; their knowledge of the second coming of the Saviour was derived entirely from the words of the Saviour; and of the express meaning of these words, as referring to a future event, they were completely ignorant. In quoting his prediction they, therefore, seem to have held a persuasion that this second coming was very speedily to be accomplished. Thus they speak of the "day of the Lord" as "at hand,"—of "the Judge standing at the door:" and Paul, in particular, seems to have believed that some of the Christians of that day, if not himself among them, would live to see its approach.

Whether this latter opinion be true or not, certain it is that the words of the apostles had such an effect upon the first Christians, that they were in momentary expectation of the appearance of the Lord. During the first nine centuries after his ascension, a general idea prevailed that his second coming would speedily take place; and when, after waiting nine hundred years, they found their expectations disappointed, they still looked to the one thousandth year to usher in this great event; and so powerfully did this opinion operate upon the world, that rich and poor flocked in great numbers to the Holy Land, there to await his appearance. The wealthy sold their possessions, or gave them away to charitable institutions; kings quitted their thrones, and subjects their employment, under the impression that "the end of all things was at hand," and that the world was of no further value. Such, then, was the effect of a misapplication of prophetic language; and though nearly nineteen hundred years have gone by, yet are the Christian churches still following in the steps of their predecessors, holding the literal sense of the Word in defiance of reason, and looking for the Lord's personal appearance in the clouds of heaven, though common sense proclaims its improbability.

But to return. From a comparison of the descriptions of the apostles with the predictions of the Lord, it is easy to perceive whence they quoted. In many instances the two accounts are almost word for word the same; in others they are enlarged; but in none is the connexion of events, or the prophetic symbols, disturbed. "The day of the Lord (says Peter,) shall come as a *thief in the night*, in which the heavens shall *pass away* with a great noise." Here it is easy to perceive whence the words of the apostle were drawn; for we have only to compare them with those of our Lord, to be convinced that it was from these the description is taken. "Heaven and earth (says the Saviour) shall *pass away*, but my words shall not pass away." "Know this, that if the good man of the house had known at what hour *the thief* would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through." Again, Paul declares, "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the *archangel* and *the trump* of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Here, too, the prophecy is quoted from the Saviour's declaration: "He shall send his angels with a *great sound* of a *trumpet*, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Once more the Apostle John says: "Behold, he cometh *with clouds*; and every eye shall *see* him, even they that pierced Him; and all *the tribes of the earth* shall wail because of Him:" where the allusion is to these words: "Then shall appear the sign of the coming of the Son of Man in *heaven*; and then shall all the *tribes of the earth* mourn, when they *see* the Son of Man *coming in the clouds* of heaven, with power and great glory." "Behold, (says the Lord) I *stand at the door* and knock;" "Behold," says the apostle, echoing the Saviour's words, "the Judge *standeth at the door*."

It would exceed my present limits to enter fully into this subject. Suffice to say, that in most passages

the reference to our Lord's predictions may be plainly discerned; and in all the prophetic representatives are retained: The sun,—the moon,—the stars,—the earth,—the heavens, darkness, dissolution, and fire—the very images which are used by the Saviour, are likewise used by the apostles, and used, too, with a reference to the *same period*—the last days of the Christian church. If these images, when used by the prophets and by the Redeemer, are figurative, then, as the same *images* applied to the *same period*, they are figurative when employed by the apostles. Or, if the dissolution and burning of the earth described by the latter are literal facts, then the burning of the earth and its dissolution described by the former, are literal facts likewise; for the *same images* applied to the *same period*, must have the *same meaning*.

If, then, these observations be correct, and I see not how they can be fairly controverted;—if the apostles did not, except in one instance, possess the power of foretelling future events, and if their descriptions of the second coming of the Lord are gathered from his own words, or from the prophetic writings, then we must judge of their meaning by that of the prophecies whence they are derived. This is a plain and self-evident conclusion. If I quote the words of any writer, the meaning of the quotation must be gathered from the works of that writer; and more especially if I quote for a similar purpose, and profess myself one of his disciples and admirers. The passages, therefore, which occur in the apostolic writings, are by no means decisive proofs of the doctrine in debate. As quotations and paraphrases of the Lord's words and those of the prophets, they must, by every rule of fair criticism, have a similar meaning. We have seen that the former are, by the acknowledgment of the most learned writers, figurative and correspondent; the just inference therefore is, that the latter, as quotations and paraphrases of them, must be figurative also.

4. The last part of our proposition comes now before us, namely: that the doctrine of the destruction of the universe is opposed to the end of creation, and to the character of God as a Being of unbounded love and infinite wisdom. I may here be told of the tendency of matter to dissolution; of its mutability and constant change; of the elements of destruction which nature herself engenders; and of all those by which reason and science have sought to gloss over the popular tenet. But the *mutability* of nature is no proof of final dissolution. *Mutability* is liability to change, or a continual tendency to remove from one state to another. Whatever is changeable, or whatever can experience alteration, is, therefore, mutable. But this mutability attaches not to material nature alone, but to all creation; the highest archangel in the highest heaven, as well as every spirit embodied on earth, is a mutable creature. The state of glory in the eternal world, as well as the state of man below, is a state of *mutability*,—a state in which there are continual changes either for the better or the worse. This will appear plain if we consider that, whatever is immutable cannot be acted upon by any higher power; for the action of such a superior cause supposes a corresponding *effect* and that effect supposes a *change* in the object acted upon, in one way or another; and, consequently, any object upon which an effect can be produced, must be a mutable or changeable object. Now, in the case of angelic beings, God, the First Cause of their existence, is continually acting upon them by his love and wisdom, and thus raising them eternally in the scale of blessedness: such alteration of their state from glory to glory is a change,—an effect produced upon them by an Almighty Cause; and this effect is at once a proof that angels themselves are *mutable* creatures, or liable to change. The same may be said of the state of blessedness; it is continually receiving fresh supplies of glory from the Fountain of life, and is thus *changing*—becoming more and more blessed: and it equally applies to the spirit of man. This, like the mind, is never "at one stay;" nor, perhaps, does the state of the mind remain precisely the same for two hours together. The angels of heaven, the state of the blessed, the spirit of man, are all changeable. God is the *only immutable Being*; for He alone cannot be acted upon or changed by any higher power; and hence it is one of his exclusive prerogatives to be "without variableness or shadow

of turning." If, then, the angelic hosts, as well as heaven itself, are mutable, while yet they endure for ever, the mutability of nature is no proof at all that she, any more than the former, is approaching dissolution.

"Nature herself," as one well observes, "effects her renovation from her decay." Matter, though decomposed and subjected to ten thousand changes, loses none of its essential properties; but continually assuming new forms, gives variety to the world, without being at all altered from its original nature. Indeed, it has been strongly asserted that there has not been a particle of matter lost from the creation to the present moment; changed every particle may have been, but still there is not one wanting; and if this be the case, such continual change is no proof of approaching destruction.

We are accustomed to look upon God as a Being of infinite Love; and, perhaps, at this stage of the subject it may be well to inquire, what motive induced the Lord first to create the visible universe; and what was the end proposed in its creation. In the breast of the Divine Being there could exist but one motive from which creation could spring; and this was Love. But the Love of God being infinite, could only have respect to an eternal work; hence the end of creation was to make as many beings as possible happy, and this to all eternity. In order to accomplish this, infinite *Love* clothing or embodying itself in *wisdom*, made the worlds. According to the words of the apostle, "By the Word (or the wisdom of God,) were the heavens made;" intending these as the habitations of rational beings, who after having passed through a short state of probation, might finally enter upon a spiritual state and enjoy perfect happiness. The wisdom of God, being the manifestation of his love, in completing this work, arranged everything in the most perfect order; and accordingly every part of the universe is formed in the manner best fitted to promote the end of its existence,—the everlasting happiness of man. In our own world, where evil has produced a corresponding change in outward things, even that change itself is good, since, while it reminds man of his corruption, it leads him to seek a better habitation.

Thus far our assertions are easy of proof. GOD IS LOVE;—not merely *loving*, but LOVE, the Spring and Fountain of all derived existence. And love, even in its derivative form in the bosom of man, is an active passion, continually seeking for objects on whom to bestow its affection. As is the stream, then, so is the fountain: God being Love in its Infinite Essence, must ever have sought to form creatures capable of being rendered eternally happy; and hence the motive that led to creation. But *love* always manifests itself in the understanding or thought; and by the thought is brought into outward action. It is the thought or wisdom of man in which his love first takes a definite form; this serves it for a guide, and directs its operations: and so again is it with the Being in whose "image" we are formed. The manifestation of infinite Love, is infinite Wisdom; and this brings the power into outward act: by infinite Wisdom, therefore, as the acting form of infinite Love, were rational beings and their varied habitations created. But this perfect wisdom can never produce anything unlike itself; for, as is the *cause*, so is the *effect*; hence the frame of nature which that wisdom calls into being, must be like itself, the most perfect and complete that could possibly exist. The *motive*, therefore, which led to creation was *Love*; its *cause*, Wisdom; its *end*, continued and eternal happiness.

And further, as the love and wisdom of God once operated in bringing the universe into existence, so from that period have they been unceasingly employed in preserving the creatures which they formed; for, as the *end* of creation was the "bringing of many souls into glory," so, to the present, has that end been answered by the constant exercise of the Divine protection over the universe of matter and its rational inhabitants; that the one might continue a fit habitation for the creatures of God; and that by the constant procreation of the human race, a succession of men might be brought into being as candidates for everlasting glory. But the expected dissolution of the universe, and the end of human succession, will at

once put a stop to this infinite design. If, after a certain number of persons have been born into the world, the procreation of man must end, then the purpose of creation cannot be *infinite*; for that which has reference to a certain number and a definite period of time, is not an *infinite* purpose; and that which is not an infinite purpose, is not the off-spring of *infinite love*. Or, if the purpose of God in creation *did* spring from infinite love, then it must be an infinite purpose; and if the purpose of creation be infinite, then it is not bounded by a few thousand years, nor will it end with a few generations.

Nor is the popular doctrine more consistent with the character of God than with the infinity of his designs. We have seen that *love* was the cause of the world's creation; but what motive, I ask, can lead to its destruction? There is nothing in the Almighty contrary to love; therefore, if it is destroyed at all, *love* must be still the motive. But love never works except for the good of its creatures; therefore, if the universe is dissolved, it must be because such dissolution will confer a benefit upon mankind. And the question then arises: What benefit can mankind derive from the destruction of this material world? The answer of some will be ready. "The world" they tell us, "has been changed by sin, and it will be dissolved in order that it may be restored to its pristine glory and beauty;—that a new heaven and a new earth may spring from its ashes." But does the change here supposed in the constitution of the world, require its dissolution? When sin entered into the universe, and the mind of man was contaminated, an immediate and corresponding effect was produced upon the world of matter; but the production of that effect was not accompanied by a *dissolution* of the material system; it operated surely indeed, but slowly, and without any outward destruction. Why, then, should not the change from evil to good, be effected in like manner as the change from good to evil? When the earth is "filled with the knowledge of the Lord,"—when all shall experimentally "know Him from the least even unto the greatest,"—when man is again restored to his former state of peace and purity, a corresponding change must once more take place in his material habitation; but that change requires no destruction of the world to effect it. Similar causes produce similar effects; and as a change in man from good to evil, produced an alteration in the system of the world, but without any dissolution, so a change in the souls of men from evil to good, must likewise produce an alteration in the earth, but without dissolution.

But this destruction, it is said, is to usher in "a new heaven and new earth." We are, therefore, justified in asking, for what purpose is this new material system created? Since it is believed that the succession of man will cease with *this* earth, why should *another* earth be formed? Is another race of men to be created? This, the strongest advocates of the doctrine do not even suppose. Is it, then, to be the habitation of the righteous of the present earth? This, it cannot be, for the bodies of the departed will no longer be material, but *spiritual*; and to assert that a *spiritual* substance can dwell and walk on a material earth, however pure that earth may be, is to assert what every one sees to be preposterous. Since, then, it will not suit the departed righteous, and another race is not to be formed, why, we continue to ask, will this new earth be created? Here we are left completely in the dark; nor amidst all the reasoning of the advocates of the popular doctrine, can we find a single clue to direct us to an answer.

And here the former inquiry properly comes in. Since there is nothing in the nature of God contrary to *love*, and since that love only works for the temporal or everlasting benefit of man, what motive can induce the Almighty to destroy this visible universe? We have seen that the state of mankind in time will not be improved by it; for a change in the constitution of the earth has been already, and may again be, effected without it: and, besides, whenever such an event takes place, time and the temporal existence of man will be no more: and the eternal happiness of the blessed can in no degree be increased by an overthrow of material nature; for when the spirit has left this sphere, it has done with matter, and no longer depends upon it for its feelings or its pleasures. If, then, such a dissolution of the earth as

Christians in general look for, will neither benefit mankind in time nor in eternity, then it is contrary to the character of God that He should bring such an event to pass; for He never operates unless to effect some benevolent purpose; and this will effect none, either here or hereafter.

The same reasons which induced the Almighty to call the universe into existence, will therefore induce Him to continue its existence. The desire which He felt to make as many rational beings as possible happy, led to creation. The same feeling has preserved the world in existence to the present moment. And as God is unchangeable, that desire must operate as powerfully ten thousand ages hence, as it does now; and the operation of that desire must, as a necessary consequence, lead to the preservation of this earth, from which a succession of rational creatures is to spring. If, then, at a future period the world is destroyed, and the multiplication of the human race ceases, it must be either because the Lord is unable to save more, or is unwilling to do it. The first supposition is impious, and the other supposes a change in the Almighty; for then that desire which led to creation must have ceased to exist in the Divine bosom; the infinite love of God must have ceased to operate; and of consequence, the Lord Himself must have changed both his desires and his operations. The destruction of the world is, therefore, opposed to the character of God, as a Being of infinite Love and unbounded power.

We may now sum up the arguments which have been adduced.

1. When the literal sense of a passage of Scripture is opposed to common sense and reason, such literal sense must be laid aside, as not containing the true meaning. But the literal sense of those passages which speak of a destruction of the earth, is both absurd and unreasonable. Therefore the literal sense of these passages must be abandoned, and does not contain the proper interpretation. Again: when two prophecies are found couched in the same language, and referring to a similar event, one of which is fulfilled while the other remains unaccomplished; the manner in which the latter will be fulfilled, must be judged of by the previous fulfillment of the former. But the first prophecies relating to the first coming of the Lord, are exactly similar to those which refer to His second coming; yet they never were *literally* fulfilled: therefore we have no just reason to look for a literal fulfillment of the latter. 2. When any text of Scripture is, in the letter, inconsistent with itself, or with other plain and express passages of the Word, the interpretation must be sought for in the spiritual meaning of the words. But the proofs of this earth's destruction are inconsistent with themselves, and are opposed to other plain and direct portions of the Word of God; therefore the meaning of those alleged proofs must be found, not in the literal sense, but in their spirit. 3. In the explanation of every part of the Sacred Scriptures, a due regard must be had to the connexion in which it stands; and any mode of explanation which tends to break such connexion, or is at variance with it, may be beautiful but cannot be *true*. But the connexion in which the passages referred to are found, is completely at variance with the doctrine derived from them; nor can they in any way support that doctrine until severed from this connexion. Therefore that explanation which the generality of Christians gives them, cannot be correct. 4. And, lastly, whatever doctrine is opposed to the character of God, as a God of unbounded love and infinite wisdom, is not a doctrine of the Bible. But the doctrine before us is thus opposed both to his nature and perfections; therefore it cannot be true.

The arguments arising out of these propositions might be carried to a great extent. If, however, they have been supported by reason as well as Scripture,—if we have no right to expect a literal fulfillment of the prophecy relating to the Lord's second coming; and if the literal sense of the passages must be abandoned; then we have no reason to look for an overthrow of the universe, and the improbability of such a destruction has been fairly established.

Having thus gone through the principal part of the subject, and having shown that the common

interpretation, against which so many and serious objections lie, cannot be the true meaning; I proceed, as a necessary conclusion, to notice briefly the spiritual meaning of the prophetic symbols used in the passages that we have noticed, and their connexion with each other. That the whole of these passages relate to the Christian church, we have already stated; and that they are of importance to us, may be fairly inferred from their being found in the Sacred Volume. It is, therefore, scarcely possible to conceive that even learned and pious men have been able to perceive nothing within them but earthly concerns,—mere temporal events; the destruction of Jerusalem; the conversion (whether real or pretended) of Constantine; wars in Italy; the irruption of the Goths; and the famine of the Antonines; as if these events were either able, or likely, to give that saving wisdom which it is the object of God by his Word to bestow. Everything in the Sacred Volume is intended to contribute to our salvation; but transactions like these do not tend to make us wiser or better. It is to the Christian church, and to its principles and practice, therefore, that these descriptions refer; and as they relate to the general body, they apply to every individual of which that body is composed, and thus demand our most serious attention.

The principal symbol used in these prophecies is, "the sun;" and this is said to "become black," and to be "turned into darkness." Our first inquiry, therefore, is, what principle in the spiritual world of Christianity, corresponds with this luminary in the world of matter. And in this inquiry we shall be aided, if we consider the functions it performs. The sun is the source of all natural heat and splendor; and without his influence, the worlds in the solar system, now glowing in light and beauty, would be dead and unattractive masses of matter. He is the cause of all vegetable and animal life: deprived of his beams, vegetation would decay, and the animal kingdom sink in death. He is the principal agent in the production of sight; the eye without him, would be a useless organ. In a word, if we were called upon to name the most important agent in the material world, our thoughts would turn at once to the sun. Now, in the spiritual world, including both the church of God and the individual spirit of man, what is that which produces the same effects as the natural sun does in the system of matter? What is the source of love and wisdom, spiritual heat and spiritual light?—What is it that produces in the mind those fruits of righteousness which are the characteristics of true religion? What gives to reason (the eye of the mind) its power of discerning spiritual things? and invests the soul, naturally dark and lifeless, with spiritual life and glory? It is Divine Love that does this. This is the Sun of the spiritual universe,—the Fountain of all heavenly light and life,—the Cause of every good word and work. And in giving this meaning to the natural image, we are supported throughout by the Sacred Scripture. The Lord is called "the Sun," and, "the Sun of Righteousness." He is said to *rise* upon the mind, when the spirit turns itself toward Him; and to *turn away* from man, when he departs from his Maker. In the same manner, whenever the prophets or apostles were favored with a visible representation of the Divine Majesty, they describe the face of God as shining like *the sun*. Now the face of God is his Love. Hence the Psalmist says, "Lift upon us *the light of thy countenance*, and cause thy face to shine upon us." And this love of God is described as the sun, rising, shining, and giving light. Thus, too, in the visions of John, when the apostle beheld an image of the pure church of Christ, he describes her as "a woman *clothed with the sun*;" or encompassed on every side by the Divine Love. By the sun, then, in the internal sense of prophecy, we understand the infinite and unbounded love of the Almighty, which alone is the cause of life and light; and which gives strength, support, and beauty, to the spiritual system of man.

Having obtained the meaning of this principal symbol, we shall be at no loss to determine that of the other. "*The moon*," as regards apparent splendor, is the second great luminary in the visible heavens. In herself, however, she is a dark body, and possesses no power of communicating light except by the reflection of the sun's beams. In this case, therefore, we have to seek a second principle in the heaven of

the church, corresponding with this second light in the heaven of matter; a principle which, though it enlightens and cheers the soul, has no brightness in itself; but derives all its usefulness and beauty from a conjunction with LOVE. And this principle we find in FAITH; that faith which springs from charity. As the moon derives all her light from the sun, so does true faith draw all its glory from love. As the moon separated from the sun's influence, is dark and lifeless, so is faith without love, dead and useless. And as the light proceeding from the moon is but the rays of the sun reflected from her surface, so is the faith that springs from a modification of the love of God, a reflection of his infinite benevolence.

And here, again, the apostle confirms this idea. While he represents the church of God as being *clothed with the Sun*, he also describes her as standing upon the moon, or having "the moon under her feet:"—pointing out the love with which she is continually encompassed, and the faith upon which she is securely founded. Thus Paul, speaking of the universal church of Christ, declares that it is "built upon the *foundation* of the apostles and prophets:"—that is, upon their doctrines, and upon the truth which they made known; "Jesus Christ Himself," as THE TRUTH Itself, being "the chief corner stone." Eph. ii. 20. With this, too, agrees the sublime prophecy of Isaiah. When speaking of the church restored to its full perfection and glory, he says, "*Thy sun* shall no more go down, neither shall thy *moon* withdraw herself; for JEHOVAH shall be thine EVERLASTING LIGHT and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." ix. 20. That is: Thy love shall no more depart, neither shall thy faith and charity decay; for God shall dwell in every soul by his love, and his beams shall be reflected from every bosom.

We might go through the whole of those predictions which relate to this subject; and in all cases we should find that this interpretation of the figures not only makes a complete and consistent sense, but that the passages so interpreted would stand in the most complete agreement with the general tenor of the Scriptures, and with the hopes of the best and wisest among men.

The third symbolic figure is, "the stars:" and these, as regards the quantity of light transmitted to the earth, are secondary luminaries in the visible system. They shine not with any borrowed radiance, but with their own native splendor. And here, again, we must repeat the inquiry, what are those luminaries in the *mental heaven*, which hold a secondary place in the concern of salvation, to love and faith; yet shine, not with reflected light, but with the real brightness of the Divine Glory? The answer is easy: They are the doctrines of religion or the *knowledges* of truth;—those portions of the eternal reason, which THE MANIFESTED TRUTH has Himself revealed. But some may be ready to observe, that these are already included in the Faith of which I have just spoken. A single remark, however, will obviate this objection. That FAITH and the *knowledge of truth* generally go together, is certainly true,—even as the moon and stars shine at the same time. But to *know* the truth is one thing, and to have faith in God is another and widely different thing; as different as the light of the stars is from that of the moon. And as the stars frequently shine when the moon is not seen, so does the knowledge of truth frequently exist in the mind when true faith has no existence. I am, therefore, consistent in declaring that the *light* of the stars,—the knowledge of doctrines, though a valuable acquisition, is secondary in importance both to Christian *faith* and to Divine *Love*. Yet the doctrines or truths which are the objects of this knowledge, are not derived from any source lower than divinity itself; they are, as just observed, portions of eternal wisdom designed for the guidance of the church of God; and derived from the "Father of lights," from whom proceeds "every good and every perfect gift."

In thus mentioning *doctrines*, (or the term which I have used as synonymous, *truths*, for pure doctrines are but truths embodied) I by no means refer to the tenets of a sect or party, but to the eternal wisdom of the Almighty, as revealed in his word: and with respect to this, the parallel between it and the natural

image may be carried through all its parts. As the stars are of the same nature with the sun, and like him shine with their native and proper light, so is the wisdom of God of the same nature with his love; both being essential attributes of Divinity. As the stars, however, though in themselves splendid bodies, communicate no heat to the earth, and are but of secondary importance in comparison with the sun and moon, so does the mere knowledge of truths, (although the truths in themselves possess the nature of divinity,) leave the soul as cold and lifeless as before; and is of far less importance in the spiritual system than the love of God, or faith, its reflection on the soul. Carry the comparison as far as we may, still the stars of the natural heaven correspond exactly to the *truths* of the church; and the light which they emit, to the *knowledge* of that truth.

And this interpretation of the symbol agrees, too, with the vision of the apostle. The church clothed with the Sun of love, and standing upon faith; the symbolic *moon* had upon her head (the seat of intelligence and wisdom) a crown of twelve *stars*;—denoting the knowledges of pure truth which should ornament that church in her last state of peace and holiness. So the great red dragon, who is described as fighting with Michael and his angels, is said to have drawn the third part of the stars from heaven;—pointing out the almost total extinction of real truth in the corrupted Christian churches. We might again trace this meaning in every passage where the natural image occurs, and we should still find that the sense it gives to each of them is consistent both with the Word of God, as referring to the great concern of salvation, and with the connexion in which the passages are found.

In these symbolic representations we, therefore, perceive the three sources of light in the Christian heaven, love, faith, and knowledge. The first being the diffused affection of the Father of spirits; the second, its reflection in the soul of man; the third, the truths of doctrine which enliven and ornament the church, proceeding immediately from the Source of all Wisdom. The glory of each is the same in substance, as the light of the sun, moon, and stars, is the same in nature; but it differs in degree, as the luminary whence it springs is of more or less importance to the eternal happiness of man. Knowledge is the least important; of itself merely, it produces nothing. Faith rises above knowledge; yet even faith by itself is useless. Love is the chief; this quickens, animates, and renders fruitful, the church of God, and the soul of each individual member.

I press this interpretation on no one; yet I may say, without breaking the bounds of Christian liberty, that it carries probability on its very face. The parallel between the natural image and its spiritual correspondent, is complete throughout; but this can by no means be said of the various constructions which have generally been put upon them. The sun, it is said, is the civil government of a state; and the moon, its ecclesiastical policy. But in vain shall we attempt to draw a comparison here between the natural figure and the object said to be signified by it. The civil government of an empire is not the source of all wisdom, love, and prosperity, as the sun is of heat, light, and fruitfulness. It does not give to the ecclesiastical all its power, glory, and beauty, as the sun does to the moon; nor would the church become dead and lifeless if separated from the state, as the moon would if severed from the sun. The pastors of the church, which it is affirmed are the stars, do not, like the stars, shine with their own native splendor. The comparison, therefore, does not in any degree hold good: while in the meaning we have given above, consistency both with Scripture and reason, as well as with the best interests of man, is preserved throughout.

Now if this signification of the sun, moon, and stars, be correct, we need not employ much time in fixing the meaning of the terms "heaven," and "earth," when applied to the church of God. *Heaven*, or the atmosphere, is that in which the sun, moon, and stars appear; and by means of which they produce their



effects. It is the grand reservoir of those particles, which, acted upon by the sun, and thus set in motion, cause heat; and preserve on the earth, life and vegetation. And the earth is that body, on the surface of which vegetation flourishes and life appears. This at once points out the figures as applying to the *inward feelings* and *outward life* of an *individual*; or, to the internal state of the church and its outward forms and ceremonies. It is in what the apostle calls "the inward man," that *love, faith, and knowledge* produce their first effects; and by operating upon the feelings and affections of the mind, cause spiritual light and heat—true wisdom and divine love. And these produce a corresponding effect in the outward conduct, bringing forth "fruits meet for repentance,"—the living forms and witnesses of religion. As the sun shines in the atmosphere and produces fruit on the earth, so love shines in the soul and brings forth effects in the conduct, either in the case of an individual, or of the church as an assembly of individuals. By the same rule of analogy we may perceive what is meant by *the clouds*. These in the natural world, are vapors exhaled from the earth by the heat of the sun; and which condensed into form in the atmosphere, serve to perform their important functions. They temper and lessen in some degree the heat of the sun; they serve to beautify the appearance of the heavens; they are the great depository of rain, and the principal agents in the production of tempests. That which corresponds to them must, therefore, be something springing from the outward state of man, which is the grand depository of truth (spiritual water), behind which the glory of the Divine Love and Wisdom is seen, and which accommodates this wisdom to the capacity of mankind. And this we find in the outward letter of the Word of God. The historical narratives, the figures of prophecy, the parables of the Saviour, are all images rising from the world and the temporal state of mankind; and thus, like the *clouds*, they have their origin from the earth. Within this outward body of image and narrative are contained the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; it is the grand source from which truth must be drawn. And the glory of God shines through the whole, imparting to every natural form the splendor of divinity. And as the material images of the Bible serve to accommodate the wisdom of God to the capacity of his creatures, so have they often been the cause of those convulsions in the church, which seemed even to threaten her existence. "The *letter*" has often killed, when unaccompanied in the mind with the "*spirit* which giveth life." We cannot, therefore, find in the figure before us anything which so completely accords with its origin and design, as the outward letter of the Word of God—the clouds of the Christian heaven.

The meaning of the principal symbols being thus stated, we pass to the connexion which they bear to each other in the predictions of the Saviour. We have already noted that the prophecy contained in Matthew, and recorded by the other Evangelists, refers in its primary application to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies; but in its more extensive meaning it points to the state of the Christian church in her period of decline and corruption, of which Jerusalem in her last days was a fitting type. With respect to this it is declared "*the sun shall be darkened*"—the Divine Love obscured and lost; "and the moon shall not give her light"—faith and charity shall sink in darkness; "and the stars"—the knowledge of truth "shall fall from heaven,"—no longer exist in the minds of her members; "and the powers of heaven"—the whole internal state of the church "shall be shaken"—shall be thrown into complete disorder and confusion. This meaning, to which we are led by the connexion and correspondence of the natural symbols, points to a time (not when the universe shall be destroyed, but) when true religion shall have ceased to exist in the church:—"when the love of many shall wax cold:" when true faith will no longer be found; and when knowledge—the knowledge of genuine spiritual truth—shall have passed away. The same things are described in the vision of the apostle. "There was a great earthquake"—a shaking and disorder in the state of the church; "and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth,"—the knowledge of truth

which once shone in the *mind*, sunk into mere outward *creeds* and confessions of faith; "and the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together"—the whole internal state of the church was thrown into confusion, and every inward feeling of religion perished.

The event immediately following is the appearance of the Son of Man in the clouds, with a trumpet; and since it is confessed that a trumpet signifies "the call of the Gospel," or as I would express it, the manifestation of truth; and as the *clouds* correspond to the *outward form* of the Word, the appearance of the Lord in the clouds and attended by trumpets, must signify the manifestation of spiritual love and truth in the letter of Scripture: and this is supported by what is afterwards said to be the consequence; "a new heaven and a new earth,"—a new state of the church both internal and external, both as regards inward feelings and outward conduct.

That this interpretation is true, I call upon no one to believe; but that it is probable will, I think, be confessed by all; and that it is in perfect harmony with the infinite designs of God toward his rational creatures, as well as with his character as a Being of infinite Love, will be equally acknowledged. Whether there has been a period in the Christian church (as there certainly was in the Jewish) when the above description was applicable to her; when religion had sunk into mere formality; when bigotry and intolerance both in priests and people, cut up charity by the roots; when faith was a mere body from which the spirit had departed; when the clergy were mere formalists, and the people were sensualized; when sacred knowledge was neglected by the one and unknown to the other: whether, I say, such a period *has* yet arrived, and if so, whether it was *eighty* years ago, or eight hundred, it is not my province now to inquire. My object is to show that the images used by the sacred penmen have reference to such a state, and to a subsequent restoration; and this I have shown by the rule or law of analogy existing between spiritual and natural things, as well as by the grand design of the Word of God in which those images occur.

And if it be probable that such is really the fact, then the design with which I commenced my task is completed. If the natural sense of the words of Scripture is absurd—if the best commentators themselves admit that in their outward application the words have no reference to the destruction of the natural world—and if, considered in their internal meaning, they relate to the church, its decline, and restoration; then there is no proof in the Scriptures of the dissolution of the visible universe; but strong evidence that it will never take place.

Let us, however, before leaving the subject, take a hasty glance at the two doctrines which have been presented. The first declares that after creating the universe, and endowing it with life and beauty; after forming man as a candidate for eternal glory, and after raising up a church which it is said was to endure "for ever," God will at a future time (for what reason, or to answer what purpose, is unknown,) destroy the fabric he has created; throw the whole universe into confusion and reduce it to ashes. That He will, for some reason equally unknown, put an end to the human race, and no more bring rational creatures to eternal happiness; that heaven will be closed, and not another candidate admitted; and that the church will then cease on earth, and never again be restored. And this supposition is founded on vague and mysterious texts of Scripture, and on a literal interpretation of figures which the most learned confess they cannot comprehend.

The other doctrine maintains that God, having created the world and peopled it with inhabitants, will continue it in existence; and that though religion will in the "latter ages" decline, yet at length "the Lord will appear in the brightness of his glory," will destroy evil and false-hood among men,—restore the world to its first state of purity; and that it shall then for ever become one vast temple, from which a

ceaseless song of praise shall continually arise; while its inhabitants, prepared and preparing for a higher state, shall pass in succession into the eternal rest of God; and that the earth shall therefore be a nursery for glory,—a place of trial for a continual race of candidates for heaven.

This is a consummation worthy of the Creator,—worthy of the infinity of his nature and perfections,—worthy of the plan of redemption which He became incarnate to effect. It is agreeable to the dictates of the soundest reason, and in accordance with the hopes and wishes of every man who has not bowed down his reason to the idol of popular opinion. While the opposite tenet sets reason at defiance, makes the Bible teach what is practically absurd, and stands in opposition to the opinion of some of the most learned among its own advocates.

We cannot conclude this little treatise more appropriately than in the words of a writer often quoted in these pages.

"The doctrines or principles which I have stated and defended in this work, I believe to be the truths of God. Those against which I have argued, I believe to be either false or unproved. The doctrine which cannot stand the test of rational investigation, cannot be true. We have gone too far when we have said 'such and such doctrines should not be subjected to rational investigation, being doctrines of pure revelation.' I know no such doctrine in the Bible. The doctrines of the Scripture are doctrines of *eternal reason*; and they are revealed because they *are such*. Human reason could not have found them out; but when revealed, reason can both apprehend and comprehend them. It sees their perfect harmony among themselves, their agreement with the perfections of the Divine Nature, and their sovereign suitableness to the nature and state of man: thus reason approves and applauds. Some men cannot reason, and therefore they declaim against reason, and proscribe it in the examination of religious truth."

Men may incorporate their doctrines in *creeds*, or articles of faith, and sing them in *hymns*; and this may be both useful and edifying if the doctrines be *true*. But in every question which involves the eternal interests of man, the *Holy Scriptures* must be appealed to in union with *reason* their great commentator. He who forms his *creed* or *confession of faith* without these, may believe anything or nothing, as the cunning of others or his own caprice may dictate. Human creeds and confessions have been often put in the place of the Bible, to the dishonor both of revelation and reason. Let *those* go away, let these be retained, whatever be the consequence.

[1] See on this subject, "The Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures asserted," by Rev. S. Noble:—a work well worthy the perusal of every Christian, and which deserves a place in every library.

[2] See Wesley's Sermons. Sermon xv. "preached before the Hon. Sir Edward Clive, one of the judges of his Majesty's court of common pleas, in St. Paul's Church, Bedford, on Friday, March 10, 1758."

[3] Dr. Clarke has a very curious note on this passage. He supposes that the "noise" will be occasioned by the action of electric fire, on the watery particles of the atmosphere. These, being divided into their two component *gases*, the one will ascend into the higher regions, and the other float on the earth's surface. Thus, he says, the account of the apostle is "philosophically correct." Whether this be the *apostle*, or whether such account is correct in any degree, let common sense judge.

[4] This passage in its mere outward application, refers to a temporal overthrow in the land of Idumea; it has also, however, an acknowledged relation to the triumphs of the Gospel, and the overthrow of its enemies. Still, it makes little difference in the strength of the argument, to which event it is referred. Such descriptions have been given, they have been fulfilled, yet in no case literally. This is all that need be proved.

[5] See Sir Isaac Newton,—Locke,—Dr. A. Clarke,—Burkitt, etc.

[6] See Dr. Adam Clarke's remark upon this passage.

[7] Birkitt's Notes on the New Testament.

[8] For further remarks on this text, see "Noble's Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures."

[9] Dr. A. Clarke, in loc.

THE END.

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