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OUR LORD'S PRESENCE.

The question is coming up again, "Is he present?"

Some are asking the question, while others are asserting that he is not present, that those who are teaching the presence of the Son of man are drawing largely upon their imagination; that there is no good ground for believing that Christ is now actually upon the scene of action among men.

Prejudice is very strong, begotten of early teaching and strengthened with years of training; so we may not expect to apprehend the truth all at once, nor expect our friends will do so. To expect it would be to expect something different from the general experience of [R554 : page 6] mankind. So we must be patient and wait for the seed to grow and bear fruit.

Then, as to whether he is or is not present, let us ask first, Is it time to expect him? That is, is the time for his second advent, toward which the prophecies point, fulfilled? Is it generally supposed by those who study God's word closely and carefully, and have His spirit, (others could not understand,) that the time has arrived when he should be expected? Has there not been special inquiry and expectation regarding his second coming, similar to that which existed at his first coming? Has not the time toward which the prophecies were supposed to point arrived and passed?

We think that not a few who would not like to follow out such an admission to its conclusion, would yet feel constrained to answer the above questions in the affirmative. (See "Times and Seasons," "The Jubilee Cycles and the Two Dispensations," in Day Dawn, [out of print]; also, "How will Christ Come?" in "Food for Thinking Christians"; and the forth-coming "Millennial Day Dawn.")

For those who have read or shall read the articles referred to, and who yet are troubled with the words of the angel as recorded in Acts 1:11, we subjoin a few thoughts.

When we say that Jesus' presence is a spiritual and personal presence, though invisible, we are asked if he was not a spiritual being at the time when the men of Galilee stood "gazing up into heaven?" And we answer, yes; but it was not his spiritual nature which they saw, and whatever it was, whether the very same body that was nailed to the cross, or another that resembled it, though the former is probable, it was brought into service at this time simply to convey to their minds the evidence that he was alive and had power over death, having risen from the dead. That this was the case, and that they did not see his spiritual being, is evident from what Jesus said to the disciples (Luke 24:39), "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have; so it was the flesh and bones which they saw, and we think this is indisputable evidence that, as a spiritual being only, he would be invisible to natural eyes, and this is farther verified by the fact that he WAS invisible most of the time during his forty days' stay upon earth after his resurrection. Why not doubt his presence then simply because he was invisible?"

Several times during that stay he became suddenly visible and again invisible in their presence. His object, then, in giving us evidence that he had risen from the dead, was at that time fully accomplished and is now no longer needed.

We see that his occasional visible manifestations during his forty days' stay were exceptions, and that as a rule he was invisible. There was a declaration that he would "so come in like manner" as they had seen him go, but there is no statement that he would be seen again in like manner, as in those exceptional cases. But, says one, If he come in like manner, why can he not be seen in like manner? Let us illustrate. Suppose your friend leaves his home at noon, riding in

a carriage; he says I will return in like manner as you see me go. He returns in the early morning before it is light, and you are asleep, Has that any connection whatever with his manner of return? Certainly not; neither is it necessarily implied in this passage that he would be seen again in like manner.

But what have we? We have the express declaration of Christ himself that "If any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not." Why? Because false Christ's and false prophets will arise, and they will be visible and will deceive many. If he were to appear to the natural eye, surely [R555 : page 6] there would be no harm in believing it, and instead of warning us to not believe it, we should expect to be exhorted to believe it, and to give good heed to those who should announce, Lo, here is Christ.

But his answer was in harmony with the question (verse 3), "What shall be the SIGN of thy coming?" (parousia, presence. See E.D. and R.V. margin; also Rotherham's translation, which reads, "And what the sign of thine arrival and conclusion of the age.") What sign would be needed of Christ's presence if he were visible? Surely the natural man could ask for no better evidence of his presence than to look upon him, but the child of God at this hour requires, and is furnished with better evidence than that, for modern science and invention can deceive our eyes, but the sign of his presence is such that God's children can rest with unshaken faith in it, and the enemy cannot wipe it out. After narrating the course of events which were to precede his coming, he says: "Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, behold, he is in the desert; go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chamber (materialized), believe it not." After narrating events still farther, up to the time of his presence, he says (30th verse), "And then shall appear (the glorified human body of the crucified Redeemer? No) the SIGN of the Son of man in heaven." Ah! then only those who can understand the SIGN would know of his

presence; for it is not a sign that he is soon to come, but a sign of his PRESENCE.

But, says one, it says, "Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." But it is not at the same time, nor it is the word idou, as in Luke 17:23. The root word is horao; to discern, i.e., they come to apprehend, to recognize the fact that he is indeed present; in no other way do we see how it can be made to harmonize with the preceding statements.

Now, let us read: "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and THEN (still farther on) shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall (finally) see (recognize) the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven;" all of which was understood at the first by those who could read the sign.

The troublous times cause them to mourn, and doubtless they discover that sin is the cause of all the trouble, and this would lead them to investigate, and thus finally they are led to desire as well as to recognize him.

Now let us notice the concurrence of some of the events at the time of his presence. The good news will have been "preached in all the world for a witness, and then shall the end (of the age) come," (heko, be here.) Has that been done? If not, then the end of the age has not arrived, and Christ is not present. Let such as doubt look up the evidence and see if this was not accomplished some few years ago.

There is an intimation given in the 48th verse that an evil servant will be saying, "My Lord delayeth his coming." This would not be likely to be said until some one had said he had come, nor would it be delay until after he was due to come. Both of these statements are now being made by two parties. One party says he is present, another says he delayeth to come; and they who deny his presence, smite their fellow servants, because they declare his presence.

In the 50th verse we are told that "the Lord of that servant shall come (heko, be here) in an hour that he is not aware of. In 2 Peter 3:10 we read: "The day of the Lord will come (heko, be here) as a thief," and in 1 Thess. 5:4 it is said: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief." Again in 2 Peter 3:4 we are told of a class who will be saying, "Where is the promise of his coming, (parousia, presence. See R.V. margin, E.D., also Rotherham's Translation and Young's Concordance,) for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." You say Christ has come and is now present? Pooh! The idea! Simply ridiculous! Why, everything is just as it always has been!! I don't see any difference. Don't the Bible say that he will come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory? Yes; and don't it say that every eye shall see him? Nonsense, then, to say he has come when nobody has seen him!

Thus men talk, and their aggregate sayings and doings are the fulfillment of the prophecies, and we think constitute the sign of the Son of man in heaven. (Government or rule.)

The elements are already taking fire, the friction between the contending moral and social forces is so great. The morning of the day of the Lord is cloudy, and thick darkness veils the face of nature, and only those who have light can see, and not until high noon will every eye be able to see (perceive, understand) that he is present; and when "every eye" sees him every one will be holy, "without which no man shall see (horao, discern) the Lord."

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