

THE FUTURE – SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS.

AS SEEN BY A CONGREGATIONAL MINISTER.

REV. Dr. C. I. Scofield, pastor of a large Congregational church in Texas, recently preached a sermon on unfulfilled prophecies as interpreted by the signs of the times. He said:

I am to speak to you to-night upon unfulfilled prophecy as interpreting the signs of the times. As pertinent to that theme, I ask you to look with me at the passage found in Luke 12:54-56: "And he said also to the people, when ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straitway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites! Ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?"

As a matter of fact, the ancient people of God did not discern the time of their visitation, the presence of their long expected Messiah, simply and only because they did not study the signs of their own times in the light of the prophets. From Genesis to Malachi the spirit of prophecy had been painting, broadly at first, but stroke upon stroke in ever fuller detail, the portrait of a coming one. His biography, to change the figure, was written beforehand.

In due time he came, and prophecy began to be changed into history. For three years he filled the earth and air with the very marks of identity which the prophetic portrait required. To this day the absolutely unanswerable proof of the messiahship of Jesus is the unvarying literalness of his fulfillment of the prophecies. The prophets and the evangelists answer to each other as the printed page answers to the type, as the photograph answers to the negative. And these predictions, be it remembered, were so minute and specific as to

exclude the possibility of imposture. It is open to any man to say, "I am the Christ;" but it is not possible for any man to arrange his ancestry for two thousand years before his birth, and then to be born at a precise time, in a particular village, of a virgin mother.

Looking back upon all this, we marvel that the men of Christ's own time did not hit upon [R1611 : page 23] the simple expedient of testing his pretensions by the prophetic Scriptures. More than once he challenged the test, but they remained to the end discerners of the sky and of the earth, but absolutely blind to the tremendous portents of their time.

But is it not possible, at least, that we are equally blind to equally evident signs? We have the prophetic word "made more sure," says Peter, who calls it a "light shining in a dark place," and warns us that we do well to take heed to it. But are we walking in that light? Rather, is it not true that the prophetic Scriptures are precisely the portions of the sacred book least studied? Of this we may be sure: there is nothing occurring which has not been foreseen and foretold; and of this, too, that the things foretold will surely come to pass. Is it not possible, therefore, that our Lord is saying of us: "How is it that ye do not discern this time?"

Let us proceed after this manner: First, let us look at the prophecies which describe the closing events of this dispensation and usher in the next. Second, let us look about us to see if our sky holds any portent of those things.

The first great word of prophecy, solemn, repeated, emphatic, is that this age ends in catastrophe.

"In the last days perilous times shall come. There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And

then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Luke 21:25-27.) "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be. For, as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be." (Matt. 24:37-39.) "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." And then, referring to **[R1612 : page 23]** the abundant prophetic testimony in our hands, the apostle adds, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." – 1 Thess. 5:3,4.

It is useless to multiply references when all are to the same purport. The notion that we are to pass, by the peaceful evolutionary processes of a broadening culture, by the achievements of discovery and inventions and by the universal acceptance of the gospel, into the golden age of millennial blessedness is, in the light of prophecy, the baseless fabric of a dream. True, the prophet's vision takes in that day; but it lies beyond the awful chasm of blood and tears and despair which yawns between. Toward that chasm this age is hastening with accelerated speed: this age ends in catastrophe.

So much for the broad and obvious prophetic testimony which he who runs may read. Now the book of the Revelation (and to some extent Second Thessalonians) takes up these prophecies of the end time, and enters into the detail of them. By this we know not merely that the end is calamitous and catastrophic, but also of what elements the calamitous catastrophe is made up. Observe, I do not say that the Revelation tells us what precedes the catastrophe, but of what the catastrophe itself consists.

And first it is war, and war such as this world has never seen, war colossal, universal and desperate. "Peace shall be taken from the earth." Not only organized combat of nation against nation, but the murderous passions of men shall be unchained, and "they shall kill each other." The natural results of such a condition are depicted as following famine, consequent upon unsown fields, and then pestilence.

And, second, this awful condition is to be followed by bloody anarchy – the overthrow of all settled government.

Now, it is evident that if we are indeed near the end of this age, some unmistakable signs of these coming horrors must be discoverable. Wars on the apocalyptic scale require long years of preparation. In primitive conditions, tribe springs to arms against tribe; but we are not living in primitive conditions. If, therefore, we find the nations of the earth steadily reducing their armaments, selling off their war material, sending regiments back to the forge and the plow, and dismantling fortresses, we may be sure, not indeed that the prophecies will fail, but that they will not reach their fulfillment in our time.

Similarly, anarchy in any universal sense is not the product of an hour. The conservative instincts are too strong, love of home and property and security too deep-seated. Men may, as they have, overturn a government; but it is only to establish another which they prefer. But anarchy, pure and simple, is not a spontaneous possibility. If, therefore, we find men **[R1612 : page 24]** everywhere growing in love of order and veneration for law; if we find lynchings and riots becoming infrequent, and discontent with the settled order disappearing, we may be sure that the end of the age is far removed from us. We may go on with our buying and selling, confident that our accumulations will represent some fleeting value for yet a few transitory years.

Nor need we be specially apprehensive if, upon a survey of the times, we find but a nation or two here and there in readiness for war; or a few anarchic socialists noisily venting their theories. But what are

the facts – facts so conspicuous, so obtrusive, so inconsistent, that all the world feels itself under the shadow of impending calamity?

Take the war shadow first. Have armaments been decreasing? On the contrary, Europe, the east, everything within the sphere anciently ruled by Rome (which is the especial sphere of prophetic testimony), is filled as never before with armed men. All the nations, with feverish haste, are increasing their armaments. Practically bankrupt, they are hoarding gold and piling up material of war, though perfectly aware that the strain is simply insupportable for any long continued period; and they are doing it because they all feel that a tremendous crisis is at hand.

Within two years Bismarck and Gladstone, the most experienced and sagacious of living statesmen, have said that the situation does not admit of a peaceful solution, that the world is hastening toward the war of wars, the outcome of which no man may predict. This is also the expressed opinion of that singular man whose only position is that of Paris correspondent of the *London Times*, but whose wisdom, judgment and prudence are such that he is consulted by every cabinet and trusted by every sovereign – De Blowitz. And all are agreed that the war, when it comes, must involve the earth.

Eleven millions of men are armed and drilled and ready to drench the prophetic earth in seas of blood. The Emperor William has said to his friend, Poultney Bigelow: "We live over a volcano. No man can predict the moment of the eruption. So intense is the strain that a riot the other day between French and Italian workmen at Aigues-Mortes – a mere riot – came near to precipitating the awful conflict."

So much for the war sign of the end. What of the anarchic portent? We all know that now for the first time in the history of the world is there a socialist propaganda. Socialism is a fad with dreaming doctrinaires, a desperate purpose with millions of the proletariat of Russia, France, Germany, England, Italy.

From the philosophic socialism of Bellamy and the idealists to the anarchic socialism of Spies, Schwab and Neebe may seem a far cry. How long in 1790-93 did it take France to traverse the distance from Rousseau and Diderot to Robespierre? Yes, my hearers, the anarchy sign blazes in our heavens alongside the baleful war sign. But there is more. Two groups among the sons of men are especially in the eye of prophecy – the Christian church and ancient Israel. What, let us ask, is the prophetic picture of the end of the Church age? The answer is in large characters, and none need miss it. The Church age ends in increasing apostasy, lukewarmness, and worldliness on the part of the many; of intense activity, zeal and devotedness on the part of the few.

What now are the signs? Look into our Churches. The world has come into the Church and the Church has gone into the world, until the frontier is effaced. Moral and honorable men of the world point the finger of scorn at the life of the average professor of religion. But in all our Churches are the faithful few who do the praying, the giving, the home and foreign mission work; and these have never been excelled in any age in zeal, piety and consecration. Verily, this sign, too, of the catastrophe is here.

What of Israel? As all Bible students know, the great burden of the unfulfilled prophecy concerning the Jew is his restoration to his own land. This does not mean that every Jew must return, but only that the nation must be reconstituted upon its own soil. Is there any sign of this? Every reader of the newspapers has his answer ready. In a word, there are more Jews in Palestine now than returned under Ezra and Zerrubabel to reconstitute the nation after the Babylonian captivity. More have returned in the last ten years than within any like period since the destruction of Jerusalem – more in the last three years than in the previous thirty. The great bulk of the Jewish people are in Russia, where now they are undergoing persecutions so infamous as to move to indignation and grief every generous soul. Moved with pity, Baron Hirsch is seeking to deport his suffering brethren to South America; but the Russian Jews themselves, moved by undying faith in the

prophets, have organized the great Choveir Lion association to promote the colonization of Palestine. This will succeed; the other, in large measure, will fail.

And so, my friends, looking through the vision of the prophets on to the end-time for [R1612 : page 25] conditions, and then sweeping our own sky for signs, we find the four great portents – preparation for universal war, universal anarchy, a worldly Church and regathering Israel lifting themselves up into a significance which the world dimly apprehends, but which we, who are not of the night that that day should overtake us as a thief, know means that the end is just upon us. How glorious that this lamp of prophecy not only casts its rays into the awful abyss upon the brink of which the age hangs poised, but also lights up the fair Millennial shore just beyond, where the nations of the redeemed shall walk in light and peace under Messiah's rule, with restored Israel the manifestation of his earthly glory. And even beyond that golden age we are permitted to see the new heavens and the new earth – eternity.

[R1615 : page 25]

A SAVIOR AND A GREAT ONE!

A ghastly sight shows in the shivering air
On Calvary's brow:
The Savior of mankind, in love, hangs there;
While followers bow
The head low on the breast and sadly sigh,
"How can he be Messiah – if he die?"

A jeering mob surrounds the cursed knoll
And mocks the Lord;
Yet to his lips comes from his stricken soul
The precious word –
"Father, forgive; they know not what they do – "
E'er o'er his face creeps dissolution's hue.

"'Tis finished," rings in triumph through the sky;
He bows his head.
And; while the querying soldiers mark the cry,
The Lord is dead.
All anguish past, his triumph doth begin,
The world is saved, a death blow dealt to sin.

Jerusalem, amazed, hears soldiers tell
(With terror cold)
How Christ has vanquished Satan, death and hell,
As he foretold.
And feeble fishers forcefully proclaim,
"There is salvation in no other name."

A Sabbath's journey from the city gate,
With sorrow shod,
Two sad disciples bear their sorry weight
To their abode.
The Christ appears, while holden are their eyes,
And doth expound wherefor Messiah dies.

Emmaus reached, the Lord would further go.
They gently chide –
"Thou hast beguiled our weary tears, and so
With us abide."
He brake their bread, – then vanished from their sight.
Their hearts did burn with holy joy that night.

Still thus he comes; and though the faulty sight
Of clouded eyes
Perceives him not, he makes the burden light,
And stills our cries:
For, like weaned babes, we mourn, the while he would

Our hearts sustain with stronger, richer food.

The tale is old, but ever sweetly new,
Why Jesus died.
The nail prints, doubting one, he shows to you,
And in his side
A spear thrust gapes – a passage rent apart,
For easy access to your Savior's heart.

It was for you, my brother, that he shed
His life so free.
For you, for me, he bowed his godlike head
On Calvary's tree;
That, trusting in the merit of his name,
We might be saved from sorrow, sin and shame.

The past sufficeth, surely, to have spent
In sinful deeds.
Come, join our band; and be our footsteps bent
Where Jesus leads.
So in his righteousness serenely dressed
We'll meet him face to face among the blest.
– H. HARDIE.
