

NOTES.

"Gather first the tares."

The order of events at the time of the epiphany I conceive to be as follows:

During the occurrence of the terrific physical disturbances, &c., which precede the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven, the saints will be protected in a similar manner to that described in Psalm xci., or like as Israel was from the plagues sent upon the Egyptians. They are even told to "lift up their heads" at the time when there shall be upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, &c. (Luke xxi. 25-28, and Isa. xxiv.)

Then the Lord descends from heaven to the air, the trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ are raised and the living changed; at the sounding of the trump angels are sent forth to gather the elect "from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." (Mark xiii. 27.) Before the glorified saints rise to meet the Lord, angels "sever the wicked *from among* the righteous," and then the latter are "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." Thus both righteous and professors are caught up in separate companies to the throne of the Son of man in the air. (Matt. xxv. 31, 32.) That the Lord will be manifested on His throne of glory amid the clouds is plain from Dan. vii. 13; Matt. xxiv. 30, xxvi. 64; Rev. i. 7, vi. 16, xiv. 14. (See next note.)

We are not told what ministry the angels perform who are sent to gather the elect; but we know angels ministered to our Lord at the resurrection. (See Heb. 1. 14.) That the elect who are thus gathered are not Jews in natural bodies, as some teach, is plain; for Jews would not be gathered "to the uttermost part of heaven," but to Palestine, as described in Isa. lvi. 8. Besides the nation would hardly be called "the elect" in such a connection. It is called "this people" in Luke xxi. 23.

It is plain from the scope of Matt. xiii. that the wicked there spoken of are those who have connected themselves with the kingdom by their profession of Christianity. After the Lord has "severed the wicked from among the righteous," His avowed enemies are made His footstool. Antichrist and his armies perish in the land of Judea. At the same time judgment overtakes the open enemies of God throughout the earth. "The slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth." (Jer. xxv. 29-33; Isa. lxvi. 15, 16; 1 Thess. v. 3.) The apostates of Israel will be cut off at the same time. (Ezek. xx. 38; Isa. xxxiii. 14; Zeph. iii. 11.)

Rev. xiv. 14-20 seems to be a figurative description of the judgment, both that of professors and of open apostates. "The harvest of the earth" may signify professors; and "the vine of the earth" includes all who, in spite of gospel light, are found running in the way of Cain, Balaam, and Korah. (Jude 11, 15.) "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors." (Dan. ii. 35.) "I beheld at the time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake; I beheld even till the beast was slain; and his body destroyed, and he was given to be burned with fire." (Dan. vii. 11.) So the heaviest vengeance shall fall upon the nations forming the anti-Christian confederacy, symbolized by the ten-horned beast. "They that strive with the Lord shall be broken in pieces; against them shall He thunder in the heavens; the Lord shall judge the ends of the

earth; and He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horns of His anointed." (1 Sam. ii. 10; cf. Judges v. 31; Psalm cx.)

THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS.

Though many of the wicked are to be cut off by the judgments that are poured out, shortly before and at the time of the epiphany, we learn here that false professors will be brought before the throne of glory¹ of the Son of man, to be sentenced to eternal doom in the presence of the righteous. The expression, "All the nations," cannot mean the entire population of the world. If that were the meaning, none would be left to dwell on the earth; whereas many Old Testament passages speak of the various nations as still existing on the earth after the beginning of the millennium. (Ps. lxvi. lxxii. cxlix; Isaiah ii. 2-4; lxii. lxvi. 19; Daniel vii. 14, 27; Zeph. ii. 11; Zech. viii. 13, 21; ix. 10.) All these passages and many others are directly opposed to the thought that Matt. xxv. describes a judgment of all that are alive on the earth at the time of the Second Advent.

Again, there are some scriptures which imply that all the living wicked will not be extirpated at this time. Christ is to "rule all nations with a rod of iron." (See Ps. lxvi. 3, 7; cxlix. 6-8; Micah vii. 16, 17; Zech. xiv. 16, 17.) Therefore we must conclude that the wicked who are removed from the earth at this time are a particular class; namely, those who are especially responsible, because of having heard the word of God, and having professed themselves His people. The ground on which sentence is pronounced upon them indicates that this is so. Why then does the Lord say, "All the nations"?²

Those whom He was addressing were accustomed to the thought that God only manifested Himself to the nation of Israel. It is Israel who says, "We are thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture." This will be literally true of Israel in millennium, when they will be known as "the seed which the Lord has blessed." (Isaiah lxi. 9.) Our Lord therefore informs them that those who are gathered before His throne in this scene are Gentiles who have professed to belong to Him. The idea of entire nations being brought before Him at this time is quite untenable. This passage emphasizes the teaching of the three preceding parables of the household servant and virgins and talents.

Therefore, wherever the Word has come, men are brought into a new relation to God of augmented accountability. In Romans xi. 20-22 the same truth is touched on, for the privileged Gentiles are warned as to the result of neglecting their privileges.

At the same time that the wicked are sentenced, the saints are manifested before their Lord, and each receives his own meed of praise. (Rom. xiv. 10, 11; 1 Cor. iv. 4, 5; 2 Cor. v. 10; 1 Peter i. 7; Rev. xi. 18; xxii. 12.)

Perhaps Paul had before his mind this striking description of the tribunal³ of Christ when he

1 Compare Matt. xxv. 31 with chapter xvi. 27; Luke ix. 26, xii. 8; Psalm l.

2 The same word is also rendered Gentiles, and the same expression is in 2 Tim. iv. 17, "All the Gentiles." Christians are called Gentiles in Rom. xi. 25, xv. 16, Eph. iii. 1; Christendom in Rom. xi. 11-13.

3 The word "bēma," translated judgment-seat, is used for the rostrum of a judge in Matt. xxvii. 19; Acts xviii. 12; xxv. 6, 10, 17. I notice this because an incorrect assertion is current about the word, that it is only used in connection with the giving of rewards. The way this subject is spoken of in the epistles as a well-known truth suggests that our Lord's words had been told to the saints.

speaks about the visit of Onesiphorus to him in his prison; for he adds parenthetically the prayer, "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord *in that day*." (2 Tim. i. 18; compare iv. 8.) The apostle hoped that the action of Onesiphorus proceeded from "faith that worketh by love" (Gal. v. 6)--the only motive acceptable to God--so that his friend might be among those to whom "the righteous Judge" will say, "I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Many will appear among the wicked in that day who had done many works which were good in outward appearance, but were not according to God, because the heart was not purified in its motives "by faith." (Matt. vii. 22, 23; 1 Peter i. 21, 22.) It is worthy of note that the wicked justify themselves, the righteous are justified by God. (See Luke xvi. 15; Rom. viii. 33, 34.)

On this occasion the Lord does not make inquisition into all the actions of the life, as will be done at the final judgment of the wicked. (Rev. xx. 12.) Only that which is worthy of commendation is remembered in the case of the righteous. Their sins and iniquities, according to the riches of God's grace, are remembered no more. (Eph. i. 7; Heb. x. 17.) God's book of remembrance for His saints seems to be, like Heb. xi., a record of only those actions which have been the issue of their faith in Himself. Hence there was no presumption in Nehemiah's request (Neh. v. 19), or in Paul's assurance, that he would receive a crown.⁴ (Malachi iii. 16.) It is said, in John v., that the believer will not come into judgment. "He cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life."

Nothing is said in Matthew xiii. as to the wicked being brought before the Lord's throne before being consigned to the furnace of fire. But before a full view can be obtained of any subject all the scriptures bearing upon it must be considered.

**"AS THAT THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NOW PRESENT,"
AUTHORISED VERSION, "IS AT HAND."**

2 Thess. ii. 3.

The alteration made by the Revisers renders this passage almost unintelligible. The Thessalonian saints had been fully instructed in the subject of the second coming (see v. 5, 15), and must have been familiar with the Old Testament description of the day of the Lord. Therefore the notion is absurd that they had been beguiled into the belief that "the day" had already come--without the Lord Himself,⁵ or any of the preliminary and concomitant events foretold in Scripture.

On the other hand, it is quite credible that they might have shown a disposition to give heed to some quasi-prophetic utterance that the day was certainly very near. Hence some had given up working for their livelihood. The severe persecution which they were passing through would make the news that the Lord's coming was close at hand very acceptable. Paul teaches them, in chap. i., that it is quite right to look forward to the coming as the time when all saints will be rewarded with rest from the opposition of the wicked; but he goes on in this chapter to rebuke them for departing from Scripture in their view of that event. Among the meanings, in Liddell and Scott's lexicon, given for the word translated "is now present," we find "to be close upon," "to

⁴ That some of the saved may lose reward through unfaithfulness is plain from 1 Cor. iii. 14, 15; ix. 24-27; Col. ii. 18; and Rev. iii. 11. "Then shall each man have *his praise* from God." (1 Cor. iv. 5.) For the time of the event see 1 Peter i. 7; v. 4; Rev. xxii. 12.

⁵ 1 Thess. iv. 16.

be at hand."

It is mostly the participle which is used with the meaning "to be present." It is true that elsewhere in the New Testament the word is used in this sense, but in every instance except one (2 Tim. iii. 1) it is the participle which occurs. The Latin *instare* is an exact equivalent of the word, and it is often used in the sense of draw nigh, impend. It is very probable that Paul took our Lord's prophecy in Matt. xxiv. as a foundation for his exposition of the subject. It seems to me that he refers to this discourse in remonstrating with them for having so soon let go what he had so carefully taught them. The word used for the gathering together of the elect in Matt. xxiv. is a verb formed from the substantive translated "gathering together unto" in verse 1. His "Let no man beguile you" corresponds with our Lord's "Take heed that no man lead you astray . . . these things must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet." Our Lord tells us that before His coming the abomination will be set up in the holy place as foretold by Daniel; so does Paul in verse 4.

It is remarkable that this passage should now be used to inculcate a doctrine identical with that which it was written to confute. This is the more inexcusable because of the passage which immediately precedes, where it is stated that suffering saints will be recompensed with rest "*at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire . . . when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at,*" &c.

"THE MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS DOTH ALREADY WORK."

2 Thess. ii. 7.

Many have taught that the opposition to the gospel by pagan Rome and the unbelieving Jews is what is referred to as the mystery. However, even at this early date Satan was already at work in a much more subtle and deadly manner, as the corrupter of Bible truth, as evinced by this very chapter. (See 2 Cor. xvi. 3, 14, 15, and 2 Peter ii.) In the first epistle of John the essential characteristics of anti-Christian error are clearly delineated. (1 John ii. 18, 22; iv. 1-6; also 2 John 7, R.V.) I gather from this epistle that all doctrines and religious practices which tend to disparage the Person and work of the Son of God are the workings of the mystery of lawlessness. In this age, when the Holy Spirit, who is "the Spirit of truth," is dwelling in the members of Christ, Satan is working more than ever as "the spirit of error," as the fabricator and sower of doctrinal errors, through which the truths of the Christian faith are counteracted and neutralized. Open opposition, such as that of pagan Rome, would not be called a mystery.

Priestcraft, Sacramentalism, Broad-churchism, Rationalism, and oppositions of false science, are all leading on to open infidelity. Presently the mystery will be succeeded by "the revelation of the lawless one" as the avowed opposer of God and His Christ. (Psalm ii. 3, 4; Daniel vii. 25; xi. 36; 2 Thess. ii. 4.) The words of Christ to the Jews are also true of Christendom, "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me that ye may have life. . . . I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another will come in his own name, him ye will receive." (John v. 39, 40, 43.) "Whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing." (2 Thess. ii. 9,10.)

The antichrist is said in Rev. xix. 19 to make war with the Lamb, because God has at that time identified Himself with repentant Israel. "The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." (Numb. xxiii. 21.) The revelation of the glory of the Lord will strike abject terror into His enemies. (See Isaiah ii. 19; Rev. vi. 15, 16.)

**"ONLY THERE IS ONE THAT RESTRAINETH NOW,
UNTIL HE BE TAKEN OUT OF THE WAY.
AND THEN SHALL BE REVEALED THE LAWLESS ONE," &c.**

2 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

Adherents of the Secret Rapture hold that the hindering one is the Holy Spirit in the Church, who, they say, will be withdrawn from the earth before the rise of Antichrist. But it is nowhere stated elsewhere in Scripture that the Spirit will ever be withdrawn; and it would be strange indeed if His enlightening and sustaining influence should be withheld at the very time when most urgently needed by the saints. Besides, the action of the Spirit in the Church would not oppose any obstacle to the rise of antichrist. We know that there will be on the earth at that time a multitude of saints (Rev. vii. 9, 14), who will overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Rev. xii. 11); and yet it is just at this time that antichrist comes to the height of his power.

I understand "the restraining one" to be God as governor of the nations, and the restraining thing of verse 6 to be civil government, which is spoken of in Scripture as his ordinance, and therefore is controlled and sustained by Him. The literal translation of verse 7 bears out this exposition. The words "until He be taken out of the way," should be "until He be from the midst" (*ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται*). The way the restraining power is referred to as something well known to the Thessalonian believers--and the passage was written for us as much as for them--favours the view I have given. We are told clearly in both Old and New Testaments that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." (Dan. iv. 32.) "God is the judge; He putteth down one, and lifteth up another." "He saith of Cyrus he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure." (See Rom. xiii.; Titus iii. 1; 1 Peter ii. 13, 14.) It is true, with respect to the moral condition of unregenerate men, that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one."

When the cup of Christendom's iniquity is full, God will stay His restraining hand, and Satan will carry out his fell purpose of placing a blaspheming apostate upon the highest pinnacle of earthly power and glory.

"And he (the dragon) stood upon the sand of the sea.⁶ And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and upon his seven heads names of blasphemy. . . . And the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority. . . . And they worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with Him?" (Rev. xiii. 1-4.)

At the beginning of Rev. xvii. a woman is seen seated on the waters. Corrupt Christianity has long held sway over the nations, but at the last they will reject it with loathing, and it will be

⁶ In Rev. xvii. 15 this symbol is explained as signifying "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."

succeeded by a system of undisguised blasphemy under the headship of Antichrist--the wilful king of Dan. xi. 36. Though the woman is said to be the city Babylon, it does not follow on this account that she does not represent spurious Christianity; for in considering this vision we should bear in mind that it describes a state of things that will exist at the time of antichrist. It is possible that the last and worst phase of that system, which hitherto has had its centre at Rome, may at the time of the end have its principal seat in restored Babylon. For a long time it has been the habit to understand Babylon as Rome, but that view would make it appear that God explains this symbol by a symbol, while the other symbols in this chapter are explained in a literal and explicit way. It would appear from Rev. xvii. 18 that this city will be the metropolis of the antichrist's dominions. It is described in Rev. xviii. as possessed of great wealth and as attracting to itself all the merchandize of the earth. It has been remarked that Rome never has been, and from her situation never can be, a great commercial centre.

Mr. B. W. Newton, in a book entitled "Babylon,"⁷ has fully set forth the strong Scriptural grounds which exist for the view that Babylon will be resuscitated and finally destroyed in the manner foretold by the prophets. If the predictions respecting Babylon's overthrow be taken at all literally, it must be admitted that they have not yet been fulfilled. Besides its destruction is said to occur at the time of Israel's repentance and blessing. (Isa. xiv.; Jer. l. 4, 20.) It is more honouring to God to believe that His word will be fulfilled to the letter, rather than to explain non-figurative portions of it as if they were mere poetical exaggerations. It was at the end of His prophetic discourse our Lord said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The fact that in Rev. xvii. 16 the woman (Babylon) is said to be hated and despoiled by the ten-horned beast seems, at first sight, irreconcilable with the thought that Babylon is the metropolis of antichrist. But chap. xvii. evidently describes an influential system which is to have its head centre at Babylon, while chap. xviii. describes the city itself. At first Antichrist will be a professed upholder of the latitudinarian system which will include corrupted Christianity, but soon he changes his tactics and destroys this system and compels all his subjects to worship him. (2 Thess. ii. 4.)

Like the waters, and the ten-horned beast upon whom the woman sits, the seven mountains are also symbolical. A mountain or hill is used in prophecy to denote governmental power or influence. (See Ps. lxxii. 3; Isa. ii. 2. In Ps. lxxv. 6 "Promotion" is literally "mountains.") Hence the woman who is burned with fire does not signify the city, but the system which had its seat there. The destruction of the city by the hand of God is described in Isa. xiii. 19; Rev. xvi. 19; xviii.

The woman in Matt. xiii. 33, who hides the leaven in the meal, is a symbol of spurious Christianity corrupting all the truths of the Word--the wholesome meal. Leaven is fermented dough--a good thing become bad. It is an apt emblem of evil, whether moral or doctrinal.⁸ False doctrine is perverted truth; and human nature was good when created, but has "waxed corrupt after the lusts of deceit." (Eph. iv. 22.)

Edmund Shackleton, *Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?* 3rd ed. (Aylesbury: Hunt, Barnard & Co., n.d.)

⁷ Hunt, Barnard & Co., Aylesbury.

⁸ Matt. xvi. 11, 12; 1 Cor. v. 8.