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"THE CHURCH OF TODAY"

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THERE is nothing in the history of the world hitherto, and especially nothing in the present status of its affairs, to favor the doctrine of our Modern Millennialists, or to make us think it likely, if at all possible, that the Church in this dispensation, by any human activities or improvements, will ever be able to bring about a condition of universal conversion, righteousness and peace, such as some say will and must come "before" Christ comes. As no preaching of the Gospel, or efforts of evangelical workers, the holiest and most efficient in all these many centuries, have succeeded in making converts and saints of the entire population of any city or locality on this earth, it would seem to be sheer folly to expect these agencies and endeavors to do for the whole earth what they have never done for any part of it, however small. In all the ages ... whithersoever it has come it has taken out a people for the Lord, who will live and shine with him in immortal glory ... whilst ... the majority have everywhere been on the outside ... and how can we suppose that it will ever be different in the present order of things? And when we examine the condition in which nearly two thousand years of the Gospel have left the most favored nations, not to speak of the regions beyond, we look in vain for solid evidences that another two thousand years of the same would bring the world any nearer the fancied Millennial state [before Christ comes] than Christendom is at present. ... Some hold up their hands in holy horror at the idea that "Christendom," as it now exists—"this chaos of intermingled divisions, antagonistic communions and interminable contentions, jealousies and strifes"—is to remain. They cannot think that the Greek Church, the Papal Church, the disagreeing Protestant churches, together with the many sects and heretical coteries which "disgrace" the Christian profession, are to continue to the end of time.

But this state of things is exactly what has developed under "eighteen hundred years of the Gospel proclamations," and what has been is that which shall be, unless radical changes come, by the intervention of some new power and method of administration, such as the coming again of the Lord Jesus to judge and rectify will bring. ...

When we look at the evils and the tares that have all the while been growing, at the sad estate into which "Christendom has been brought" by the spirit of sect, human ambition, self-seeking hypocrisy, unbelief, misbelief and the super-exaltation of humanitarian goodishness, "which makes nought of doctrine," it seems next thing to absurdity to say that "this" is the instrument and agency to convert "the world" to truth and genuine godliness.

People say, "Oh, yes; but only set the Church aright. Put it to work to do as it should; bring it up to what it 'ought to be' in enterprise and liberality, and there

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can be no question that it will soon conquer and sway the world to Christ and salvation." Be it so; but who is to convert Christendom and put it in condition to convert the world? Reform, Reform! That is the watchword. The whole Church and the whole earth are full of reformers laboring at reforms. But the sad fact remains: "That which is crooked, cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered," while the doctoring is often worse than the disease. ... To convert the world there must first be a conversion of the Church, and that can never be until Christ the Judge shall come.

Yet another thing to be noted in connection with our subject, is the character of the times in which we live. The Scriptures abound in allusions to the moral aspect of the world in its "last" period—the period bordering on the time when Christ shall come with power and great glory, and everywhere those times are represented as full of unbelief, lawlessness, outbreaking sin, rampant lust, blasphemous mockery, and reviling of sacred things,—a very carnival of bad passions and God-defiant crimes.

The question, therefore, arises, whether our times are not of the character thus divinely described and fore-intimated. ... Have "we" not withal fallen upon a time of extraordinary degeneracy and wickedness? Has there not come a grievous falling away from the faith, a giving of heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies? Have not people become lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to law and rightful authority, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, "holding certain forms of godliness," but failing to show the power of godliness in their lives? Have "we" not plentiful examples of those mockers who were to come, walking after their own lusts and likes, and saying "Where is the promise of his coming?" [Parousia, presence, Diaglott translation.]

Think of the startling multiplication of divorces, the breaking down of the sacredness of marriage, the shameless prevalence of licentiousness, and the commonness of infanticide, and secret bloodguiltiness of which physicians tell. Note the growing indifference to the solemnity of oaths, to sacred promises, to moral obligations, to the laws of God, and to all holy things. Observe the rapid accumulations of colossal robberies, swindles, defalcations, embezzlements, rascalities and false dealings, which disgrace our civilization, much of it also in high places, by people of social rank, education and refinement. Estimate the increasing killings, murders, incendiarisms and lawless and malicious misdoings of men and women, and the trampling under foot of right and justice in

political, commercial and banking circles.

Observe the awful increase of suicides, which, within the past few years, have exceeded the number of 200,000 per annum! Lusts and crimes and fiendish passions seem to have reached flood tide, blossoming like trees in springtime, filling our "daily journals with their stench," and yet, treated and familiarly talked of as ordinary and trivial things! And when we consider that all this is within the realm of so-called Christendom, we may well wonder that we should have Christian people singing over it, and telling us that we are on the march to a glorious Millennium [before Christ comes]. What this state of things betokens is not Millennial Glory, but "the day of Judgment, on the margin of which the world of to-day is reading." ...

The question whether there is to be a glorious Millennium on this earth before the return of Christ is not to be decided by what is most agreeable to our reason and fancy, nor yet by what we imagine the most effective to stir zeal in effort to benefit the world lying in sin, but by what the Word of God says. What does not accord with the Word must go under, without regard to human likes, reasonings or opinions. ... That many good and sensible people have need to examine the question with more thoroughness than they yet have done, is abundantly evident; and that what we have thus written may help some to right conclusions, is our earnest wish. ... Nor can we leave the subject without solemnly laying it on the consciences of all whom we can reach, not to rest satisfied with notions which flatter and please a rationalistic fancy, but which they have never critically examined; and to beware of giving sanction to a modern popular persuasion, which they may find without just foundation in Scripture. ...

It is indeed a fact for all to consider, that the side which we take on the question will and must make serious difference in the whole system of our theological thinking. There is scarcely a doctrine which is not

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more or less affected by the ground we take upon this question. Our decision will and must affect our views of the Resurrection—of the Kingdom of God—of the Second Coming itself—of the Nature and Purpose of the Present Dispensation—particularly of the Judgment, and what is to come after it, and the whole condition and life of the finally redeemed. ...

And it will and must make or unmake to us many most pregnant passages of Holy Writ, rendering them grandly luminous, or sealing them as meaningless and uncertain—mere riddles for interpreters to guess at, without agreement as to their clear and certain import.

A decision so far-reaching and momentous in its consequences and effects cannot safely be

treated with indifference, and certainly demands a very serious, candid and thorough examination, that the conclusion may be one solidly founded in the revelations given us in the sacred Scriptures.

For our part we are deeply convinced and satisfied that the doctrine of a glorious Millennium of Christianity triumphant throughout all the world before Christ comes, is "groundless" and damaging to the cause it would promote.

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