

Poetry.

The Answered Prayer.

I have a prayer upon the wall, Within my room; Couched in those simple words—"God bless our home!"

Opening Address of the Prophetic Conference at Mildmay Park, London.

BY REV. HORATIUS BONAR, D. D. Christ's own Testimony in Regard to his Second Coming.

"But take ye heed; behold I have foretold you all things."—Mark xiii. 23. I introduce myself with the Master's own words, for I have specially to speak of the Saviour's predictions, and I ask you to notice the peculiar emphasis of these words of his.

That seems to me recalling them to the words of the Lord. "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord,"—bringing them back to the Lord's own testimony and reminding them of things spoken by him who had said, "Take ye heed; behold I have foretold you all things."

But before taking up the special subject I should like to premise a few general words and shall make them as brief as possible. That eminent theologian of the last century, I mean Jonathan Edwards of America, in the latter days of his ministry records in his diary this remarkable experience of his own. He says, "I am getting vastly more charitable and am getting vastly more uncharitable in my declining years. So many of whom I have had little hope have stood well, and so many of whom I thought I had every hope have gone back, I am getting more charitable and I am getting more uncharitable." Now, I apply this phrase, changing the word charitable into certain,—and I speak my own experience in this matter, and I compromise no one but myself in saying what I do.

I am greatly more certain as to the Second Coming of the Lord being the Church's hope. That is the first thing. I feel greatly more certain, as the years roll on, regarding the pre-Millennial Advent. I feel greatly more certain concerning the First Resurrection and the Millennial Reign. I feel greatly more certain concerning the Times of the Restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy Prophets since he world began. I feel greatly more certain concerning the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. I feel greatly more certain in reference to

Israel's prospects of glory in the Latter Day, after their scattering of 1800 years. I feel greatly more certain with reference to the doom of Antichrist, whatever that name may include and doubtless it includes a great many things. So regarding these things that I have thus briefly enumerated and on which I should have liked to dwell, I would say I feel the power of a demonstration now. They form part of what appears to be a demonstrative creed.

But then, on the other hand, there are some things regarding which I am more uncertain than I used to be, for though I had thought some forty or fifty years ago that I had settled a great many of the prophetic questions which have now come to be unsettled. I feel uncertain in reference to systems of interpretation of the Apocalypse.

I confess I that I don't adhere, I may say, to any of the different schools. I profess to be a learner still in regard to the Apocalypse, and I am waiting for light, and I believe the Holy Spirit will give it, and that we shall, ere long, it may be, understand that marvellous book which the Church has been, age after age, trying to comprehend, but which, I believe, it has hitherto failed, in a great measure, to unravel. I feel also uncertain as to the details of events, and relations of events, especially regarding Israel's Latter-Day history. It is not that I do not believe every word that is written concerning Israel in the Latter Day, but I feel at a loss to tell how to arrange the various things which at first sight seem to conflict the one with the other.

And I feel uncertain as to the personalities or of the personages and positions and relations of the following names or nationalities which figure in the prophetic Word—Babylon, Assyria, Edom, Elam, Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Gog and Magog. God has something in store for all these, but I confess I stop there. I am not able to say more or arrange the future of these, but there I leave them and am quite sure that ere long we shall get light upon them, and that the event will prove that the Holy Spirit had a special meaning in what he has written concerning them in the prophetic Word.

Let these things suffice, brethren—perhaps they are too brief—to let you know something of my own experience in reference to the greater certainties and the greater uncertainties that have passed through my mind during these many years since I began to study the Word. There is just one thing in connection with this matter which I should like to add, and it is with regard to the certainties, for it applies to the whole, and I should like to avow it solemnly in these days. I feel vastly greater certainty in reference to the Divine authority and verbal inspiration of the Word of God. If ever a doubt passed through my mind during the last fifty years, in reference to these, that doubt has disappeared. And then in connection with this I feel a greater certainty as to the literal interpretation of the whole Word of God—historical, doctrinal, prophetic. Literal, if possible, is, I believe, the only maxim that will carry you right through the Word of God Genesis to Revelation.

Now let me return to the Master's words: "Take ye heed, behold I have foretold you all things." The word "take heed" is literally "LOOK." It is the Master's own word. It is not the apostle's word as you find it in 2nd Peter, wherein it is said, "Ye do well to take heed;" it is another word; "Look," says the Master, "use your eyes," as we should say. "Look," and that word, even apart, brethren, from what follows, is full of meaning. This is his message to his own people. A Christian is a man who can see afar off. He has got eyes and he has got the eye-salve to enable him to use his eyes and purge his spiritual vision.

The apostle describes backsliders as those who cannot see afar off, and who have forgotten that they were purged from their own old sins. A Christian then is a man who can see afar off. He is a far-seeing man. He is the only far-seeing man that the world contains, and hence the Master, speaking, if one may use the other figure in reference to the ear, thus—the Master says to him, "He that hath eyes to see let him look."

I look behind and what do I see? 6,000 years of ungodliness, and rebellion, and crime, and wretchedness, covering the fair face of the earth, the earth which God created perfect—and in looking back I can rejoice that 6000 years of such a history are already done.

I look beneath and what do I see? I see myself upon the Rock; the Rock that never moves; the rock of Ages, and I see

hell beneath my feet. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly, and in a measure he has already done it. I see that beneath, and when I raise my eyes as the Master has bidden me, I look to the right hand and to the left and to each side of me, and what do I see?

I see angel guards conducting me in my pilgrimage, and see principalities and powers contending together with those angel guards and with me to hinder my progress, and my whole pilgrimage is thus on the right hand and on the left, conducted between these two strange invisible powers—the angels, the ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be the heirs of salvation, and the principalities and powers against whom I contend.

I look above, and what do I see? I see Christ Himself sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding, ever living to intercede, and preparing to come again; and whenever He sees His Church, as it were, in weakness or despondency, driven back by its hosts and enemies, he cheers her by a word from his throne, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be."

Then I look before me, and when I look before me, right in front of me what do I see? I see the glory, I see, perhaps, some years, I know not how few or how many there may be, of tribulation, (for it is through much tribulation that we must come to the kingdom), but beyond this I see the dawn of the brightest day that ever shone on earth—the glory beginning to rise from out these dark clouds that encompass us about—this is the Church's future to which she looks right forward through the darkness of this present evil world. And so I use the word in all these senses. I use the word to Christian brethren—Look, take heed.

But further, in connection with this I at once proceed now to testimony, "Behold I have foretold you all things." I, your Master. It is not "Ye have been foretold all things," but, "I have done it." He speaks authoritatively, he speaks as one who has authority, and not as one of the mere children of men. "I have told you all things." Now mark the connection of this second clause with the first. It is quite possible to use the first without the second, but in this case the first would not be complete without the second. I am sending off a messenger on an important errand without telling him what he is or may expect to encounter. But if I send off a messenger and tell him, at least a considerable measure of what he may encounter, then I am telling him for his guidance what may occur, and that therefore he may take heed. In the one case he takes heed because I have told him nothing; and in the other because I have told him all that I consider necessary. The master of a vessel puts that vessel into the hands of a pilot, and bids him steer to a certain spot without telling him anything more. He may say, "Take heed that it be steered aright," but if he were to give him a description of the various perils by the way, then there would be this addition, the addition which the Lord gives here. "Take heed; lo! I have told you all things."

Now mark carefully! The Lord does not leave you in the first of these conditions. He does not say, "Take heed, for you know nothing of the way, of the dangers, or of the enemies." No! He says "Take heed, because I have not only given you a warning but I have pointed out to you the difficulties that beset your path—the dangers that lie before you. I have told you all things." Now the Lord in these words was manifestly referring to what he had been saying in Matt. xxiv. Mark xiii. and Luke xxi.—I mean his prophecy as there detailed by those three Evangelists. It is here he points out the things to which he wishes them to give heed. Observe, he is describing in these chapters the whole interval between his first and second coming.

His own second coming is the terminus ad quem. It is the point to which he turns their eyes and in connection with which all the various other parts of the predictions are brought before them. Now he tells them for their guidance what that interval is to be. They ask, "Lord, what shall be the sign of thy coming?" and he proceeds to give them certain indications and descriptions of the interval between his first and second coming, and taking up a few of them they are such as these: There was to be tribulation, and I am inclined to apply the description to the time between the first and the second coming, and I think to this the Apostle Paul referred, when he said, "Ye know that through much tribulation

ye must enter the kingdom of heaven." The interval was to be a period of tribulation for the church, but then he always seems to add, "I am coming to end that tribulation, but not till then shall that tribulation be ended. Then there are wars and rumors of wars, commotions and convulsions in the world everywhere, not only in Judæa but throughout the earth, and those are to go on more or less throughout the whole interval, and his meaning evidently is—"But I am coming to put an end to these things and not till then shall these be put an end to."

Then he goes on in Matthew xxiv. to speak of the failure of love—"Iniquity shall abound and the love of many shall cold"—and this continual declension in love is to be, (I fear we must say) the characteristic of the whole period, though there will be bright instances of the opposite; yet the characteristic of the interval will be failure in love; but then he says "I am coming to put an end to all this." And then there is sleep—the sleep not only of the world but of the church. And then there are the apostasies and the false Christs. I give you these as specimens of what the Lord points out, as what I may call the Lamb's marks of this great interval of which He says, "Take heed; behold, I have foretold you all things."

Looking at these, He bids us use our eyes, and interpret what we see from day to day; interpret past history, interpret present history in the light of this memorable prediction of His.

But I pass on to His testimony concerning His coming, and I shall be as brief as possible upon this, though it is far too important to be easily treated on or fully discussed even in a much longer address than I am timed for. The testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ as to His own advent is to be found in two places. It is to be found in those chapters to which I have referred (Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii., and Luke xvii. and xxi.) and in the Apocalypse. These are Christ's two testimonies to his coming—the one delivered on earth, the other delivered after his ascension into heaven. If you read the Gospels, especially the parables, you will find in each one—each parable I may say, almost without exception—references to his coming, and the events connected with that coming, so that you cannot understand his parables without linking them on with the Second Advent, where they close.

And in those chapters to which I have been referring—not only Matt. xxiv., but also xxv., which you should always read in connection with Matthew xxiv.—you will find that there is there the Lord's testimony to his coming, his testimony as to the events preceding it, his testimony as to the Coming itself and his testimony regarding the watchfulness on the part of his Church.

Then in the Apocalypse testimonies are without number. You may say it begins and ends with them: "Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him"—and again and again throughout its twenty-two chapters you have, "Behold I come quickly," "Behold I come as a thief;" and then there is the last testimony, "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly."—and our response is, "Amen, even so come Lord Jesus." Mark what precedes this: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him come and take of the Water of Life freely"—which verse I divide into two parts, for it seems to me to divide itself naturally into these two parts—the first being a prayer to Christ. "Come, Lord Jesus;" the second being addressed to the sinners, "come, sinner." "Come, Saviour," is the meaning of the first part; "come, sinner," is the meaning of the second; and I wish to close my address with just these words of the Lord: "The Spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that heareth say, come." It is in this position that we desire to be to-day, but never let us forget the second part. We are in the midst of a thirsty world. We see men on every side asking, "Who will show us any good?" trying in every variety and form of pleasure to quench the thirst within them, and they can find no water there.

Therefore, whilst we are looking for the coming of him who is to bring to us the glory which he has promised, oh! never for a moment let us cease to have compassion for the thirsty millions on every side of us, who have no water to drink—who have water, I should say, but will not drink it; and let us carry to them the Master's message—"If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee 'give me to

drink, thou wouldst ask of him, and would give thee living water." "If man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

And if I speak to-day to any such thirsty spirit, weary of the world, having tasted its vanities, having gone to one brother after another, and found the failure of the whole—if I speak to any such thirsty soul that would fain be happy, know not how, I say not only, "Ho, one that thirsteth, come ye to the water—come," but I take up the last words of the Apocalypse, as God's last words to men, Christ's last words to a thirsty world, "Let him that is athirst come and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely;" for thus it is that when the last trumpet is about to sound the last vial is about to be poured out, the gate is about to be closed against the sinner—thus it is that just then the message is sent out, sent out by Christ himself to a weary and thirsty world—"whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Dr. Bonar closed his address with fervent prayer.

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