

THE LAST DAYS.

"It shall come to pass in the last days."—ISAIAH ii.

"God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."—HEB. i. 1.

"Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times."—1 PETER i.

"It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh."—ACTS ii. 17.

FROM the time when the prophet Isaiah used this expression down to the end of Scripture it is found continually occurring. The successors of Isaiah took it from him and made it their watchword when they pointed to the great hereafter. And when the apostles came into the heritage of the prophets they also adopted this term: by it, or some close variation upon it, describing the fulfilment of what their fore-runners in the Old Testament had predicted. It is observable, however, that neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is the phrase precisely interpreted. It is found in a considerable variety of combinations, each of which gives it a specific shade of meaning, while all must be united if we would do it full justice. A brief exhibition of the practical uses to which the name "last days" is applied, set

forth in their order, may be a profitable tribute to the season of our present celebration. And may the Spirit of the Christian economy rest upon us all!

I. The expression reminds us that we live under a dispensation in which God has perfectly revealed His will to mankind. "God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." The Christian days are the last inasmuch as they close and perfect a series of preparatory revelations: all former disclosures of the divine will having been introductory to the teaching of the Word made manifest, Whose voice finished the holy oracles, and gave to men the last word.

The earlier days were days of the prophets. Their instruction was fragmentary and it always promised a fuller revelation in the days of the Messiah.

It pleased God for many ages to leave much of the world to the dim lights of natural religion and to broken traditions; while He dispensed to a peculiar people the beginnings of a supreme revelation, here a little and there a little, here much and there much. "At sundry times and in divers manners" were the children of men, represented by the children of Israel, instructed in the elements of truth. This is the plain declaration of the Scripture; but the profound reason of it is not revealed. Suffice for us to know that so it seemed good in the sight of Him who is the Father of lights, and Who sendeth down the gifts of spiritual illumination according to the counsel of

His own wisdom. The voices of the ancient prophets uttered through thousands of years a series of truths that from age to age grew gradually in number, clearness, and prophetic force.

But every utterance of them of old pointed to the coming of the Divine Messenger, Who should declare all the counsel of God. No one period of the ancient economy predicted the next: prophet did not fore-announce prophet; Samuel did not foretell the coming of David, nor David the coming of Isaiah. But all united to announce the advent of Christ: from Moses who predicted the raising up of a Prophet like unto himself but raised up after another prophetic order, down to Malachi who foreannounced the sudden appearance of the Divine Messenger in the temple. They all agreed in this one thing: all foretold a final disclosure of truth.

The Son of God incarnate in the fulness of time came to close and perfect this preparatory series of teaching, to give unity and completeness to this fragmentary revelation.

He has closed the long series. "All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you:" words which like many others we must regard as anticipating Pentecost. The Holy Ghost brought to their remembrance what they forgot, and developed the full meaning of what they remembered. So that in the words of Christ through the Divine Spirit we have the last words of revelation. The Saviour looked back upon all who had spoken of Him: He permits us to look for no other.

This day reminds us that we have through the

Holy Ghost the Saviour's perfect announcement of the will of God. These are now the last days, as containing the perfect disclosure of God's truth to man upon earth. Perfect it is for the purpose of a revelation for this world. There will be a fuller manifestation in another state: a vision of God for the soul furnished with an eye not only made pure but made strong also to behold Him. There will be manifestations of truth which will not only be the expansion of truth already possessed, but also the impartation of truth of which we have now no conception and none the most glimmering anticipatory hint. But for this "worldly sanctuary" and "worldly school" we have now all the instruction in Christ's word through the Spirit that we ever shall have.

Then, brethren, let us value our Pentecostal privilege. The ancient Jews made their feast of weeks also the feast of the giving of the Law, "the Eternal Law" as they delight to call it. We may celebrate this day the finishing of our Christian law: the consummation and the close of our Bible, and the end and perfection of Revealed Truth as given us in our Saviour Christ, Whose words, "perfect and complete and wanting nothing," we have in these Living Oracles.

II. All this leads to another emphatic characteristic of the Last Days: the great burden of the Supreme Prophet is His own atonement, and that atonement is in these last days made manifest. St. Peter must be our teacher here. In his first epistle

he writes down the very substance of what he preached on the day of Pentecost, that the Redeeming Christ "was manifest in the last days." Let us here dwell on the force of this word manifest, and on the privilege it proclaims to those who "believe in God."

"Was manifest in these last days" signifies that it was a reality before but not a manifested reality. It was a reality from the very beginning. The whole constitution of the world, the very frame and order of the fabric of the earth, the entire scheme of Providential government, were constructed on that assumption. The precious blood of the Lamb of God, and the Lamb of God Himself, are one and the same in the apostle's words. The virtue of the atonement was full and complete from the foundation of the world. The eternal Sacrifice was prepared. The promises were at the same time proclamations; the types of the atonement and its symbols were moving shadows of an already present reality in the heavens. In fact all the revelations of earlier times were but broken and indistinct hints of the already accepted propitiation in virtue of which the Holy God kept in existence and endured an unholy world.

But the redemption of Christ must needs be actually wrought out. The sacrifice must of necessity be accomplished. It was made manifest in the last times; and that in two senses. The actually offered atonement declared the sublime mystery which had been hid from ages and from generations. The setting up of the cross was the fulness of the

time, the perfection of the world. When the Lord cried "It is finished," He signified that with the voluntary surrender of His spirit as the suffering of death for human transgression all the designs and all the promises of God were fulfilled and accomplished. It must be that He should die as a vicarious sacrifice, and thus it was fulfilled. The very cross itself was not a subject of prophecy: but this atoning endurance, as representing the race, of the punishment due to sin, was the soul of the Old Testament. And this leads to the remark that the real Manifestation of the sacrifice was on the Pentecost and not in the hour of the crucifixion. Thick darkness involved the cross: signifying this, among other things, that, though the hour of its sacrifice was come the hour of its explanation was not yet fully come. Now the Holy Ghost really took down and buried and raised again the body of Jesus; and He has the cross for ever in His keeping. In Him—the Holy Ghost—are hid all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of Christ. Yea, rather, in Him and by Him they are revealed, and no longer hid. Hid in Christ they are made manifest in the Spirit. The glory that descended on the morning of Pentecost and took the form of tongues lighted up the cross before it glorified the Church.

How glorious, then, is the privilege to which we are called; and, at the same time, how solemn are our responsibilities!

Whether we think of the full manifestation of the Saviour's person or of His atoning work, how blessed are our eyes which see, and our ears which hear,

these wonders of the later time! What a transcendent blessing to look at the unveiled Lord with an unveiled face: the thick darkness rolled away from the cross like the stone from the sepulchre! Let us this day think earnestly and practically upon our exceeding privilege. We are come to Mount Zion, and the Blood of Sprinkling, and the Holy Ghost Who expounds the cross. Our Saviour's sacrifice for the world is exhibited, so to speak, on this Mount Zion, that every sinner on earth may come, not in bodily presence, but in faith, to confess his sins before it, and secure his own forgiveness. Come, then, to the cross that is evidently set forth, and claim your salvation while it attracts you by its saving virtue to feel its saving power!

But we must remember that any glorious privilege involves a corresponding responsibility. The most fearful words of the New Testament are those which proclaim the coming fate of the despisers of the cross of Christ. Their rejection of the Blood of atonement and their resistance of the Divine Spirit are really one! The unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost is in very deed the unpardonable sin against the revealed atoning sacrifice of Christ. "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish!" is the terrible result Hereafter of refusing to behold the cross in faith Here. "Of how much sorer punishment" shall he be counted worthy who sees, knows, mocks at, and renounces the one method of salvation provided at so affecting and precious a cost. By the glories and the mercies of the day of Pentecost, which is not yet the "great and terrible day," but "the great and

acceptable day," I beseech you to come and wait until the secret of the atonement be made manifest to your heart.

III. This leads us directly to that glorious characteristic of the last days to which this day bears more special witness: the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit. Here again the same St. Peter is our instructor. We have heard his teaching as to the revelation of the cross in these latter days; let us hear him again at the very midday of Pentecost, expounding to the people the ancient prediction of the prophet Joel. After the Holy Ghost had descended upon the Saviour's little church, and filled all its members; after He had then gone out from that church into the world of Jerusalem, summoning them to hear His message; St. Peter proclaims to the Jews, astonished by what they saw and heard, that this was the fulfilment of the prophet's great word concerning the Hereafter: "I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh." The ancient prophet did not understand what the Spirit did signify concerning Himself. Nor at that time did the apostle, His interpreter, understand so well as he afterwards understood the import of these words. We may interpret them as it regards both the church and the individual believer.

As it regards the church at large, the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Ghost was the beginning of the perfect days of God's full manifestation among His people. View this both as to the God who is revealed, and as to the fulness of His revelation.

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Now first was the Triune God made known to His worshipping church. Jehovah, in His solitary glory, had been for ages adored. The Eternal Son of God had become manifest in the flesh, and tabernacled among us. And now the Third Person of the Trinity, the Lord Jehovah the Spirit, comes down and takes glorious possession of the church. Revealing Himself, He revealed the Father and the Son. The Triune Name, by which God had not been known to the fathers, was disclosed. The triple "Holy, Holy Holy" of the symbolical temple was explained; and on the morning of the day of Pentecost, God's praise from human lips was perfected.

Observe, by that name God had not been "known." In very deed the Three-One Jehovah had always been in His holy temple. The mystery of mediation does not require us to believe that the Trinity was created by the necessity of an atoning sacrifice. The Triune essence is the finally revealed expression of an eternal reality. The Pentecost, when fully come, only proclaimed in the hearing of the world a mystery that had been hid from ages and generations. "At sundry times and in divers manners" God had revealed His name. The Jehovah of the Old Testament was by His Incarnate Son made known as the Father: His Father as well as ours. And now the Holy Ghost, descending upon the church, makes known the Father and the Son, whilst He also makes known Himself in the unity of the Father and the Son. The Lord's Day, which is the Pentecostal Feast of the Holy Ghost, is in truth the Scriptural Trinity Sunday.

View this also as to the fulness and blessedness of the manifestation. In these last days the Holy Ghost comes down upon all, and more abundantly upon all.

It is upon all. The former days knew the Holy Ghost; but not as imparted to man universally and individually. St. Peter in the morning of that day had seen the tongues of fire resting upon each of his brethren, and upon each of the Christian sisterhood, as well as upon himself, and this gave emphasis to the application he made of the prophetic text in Joel: "I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh; upon all alike, men and women, old and young." What had been the privilege of an elect few was now to become the common heritage. God was no longer, so to speak, to limit Himself to the temple, and dispense His most precious gifts to a distinguished few, but He would as God the Holy Ghost rest upon, inhabit, and sanctify every individual believer. And the gift began to be more abundantly upon all. This is perhaps the most direct and distinguishing blessing of Pentecost, that the Spirit begins to be given in the full energy of His interior power; not only to the Church as a spirit of illumination and conversion and revelation of Jesus; but as a personal gift to the soul made penitent by His operation. The Holy Ghost in these last days is given as an indwelling Spirit to renew, and comfort, and strengthen, and sanctify the inmost nature of every believer. "They were filled with the Holy Ghost," is a new strain which, begun that day, is varied throughout the New Testament in an inexhaustible manner. By-and-by

we find St. Paul entering an assembly of believers in the ministry of John, and putting the testing question: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" He asked as if every regenerate Christian must needs know that the Holy Ghost was within him.

This leads us, fellow Christians, to a consideration of the meaning these words have with regard to the individual Christian, who is an inheritor of the Pentecostal blessing. Think how high the privilege is, and ask yourself if you verily and indeed understand it and make it your own.

How great is this privilege. I cannot better exhibit it than by pointing again to the glorious symbolical teaching of the morning of that great day under the influence of which St. Peter spoke. Whatsoever is declared to be imparted to the church through the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is regarded in Scripture as meant for the individual Christian. The fulness of the regenerating and saving power of the Divine Spirit is offered to every one; and this, dear brethren, is the highest privilege that the Gospel has brought: it is the utmost that God has to bestow, that man really needs, or that Christ's intercession can desire for us. It is this which distinguishes the Christian dispensation, the birthday of which we now celebrate. It brings an indwelling God down to every one who will receive Him. In the Incarnation our Saviour came God manifest in *THE* flesh: in the gift of the Holy Ghost He is God, not indeed manifest, but invisibly indwelling, in *MY* flesh. Here is the glory of the last and

best economy of grace. This is the crown and consummation of the redeemed estate. Christ, when He was glorified, obtained this precious gift. All previous outpourings and indwellings of the Spirit had been but preliminary tokens of this. "The Holy Ghost," in all the energy and blessedness of His personal operation, "had not been given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." Blessed, brethren, are we that live in these last days, the days of the restoration, and more than the restoration, of God's Spirit to man.

Then let me urge upon you the question: Have you received your portion of this rich and unlimited inheritance? Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? Have you ever thoroughly understood and rejoiced in the peculiar privilege of the Christian dispensation, that of being personally renewed, inhabited, sanctified by the Lord and Giver of life, the Holy Ghost? On this day remember, especially, the abundant gift of the Divine Spirit: "unto all and upon all" in an unlimited degree and in a most impartial bestowment. Had you been among the believers in Christ's name on the day of Pentecost, would you not have rejoiced in your portion of the general blessing? Surely, it is equally free to you now. This day is the commemoration. To the church it cannot be so illustrious. But to the individual it may be equally abundant in grace and blessing!

IV. One more characteristic of the Last Days our present commemoration requires to be indicated. The

Christian dispensation is gloriously distinguished as the period of the universal extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the accomplishment of the final purposes of God upon earth. This must not be passed over: the Redeemer's glory requires us to make it emphatic. Nor is there any aspect of the Last Days which the New Testament makes more prominent.

The purposes of God with regard to human salvation are now ripening to their accomplishment. Here the evangelical prophet may be our guide. His first vision concerning Christ, at the very outset of his ministry, set before the eyes of Isaiah the glorious future of mankind upon earth. "And it shall come to pass in the last days"—this was the very earliest use of the term—"that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established upon the tops of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it." This vision has the preeminence everywhere in the Old Testament.

The kingdom is for the whole world. The mountain of the Lord's house in ancient times was Mount Zion, and on it He for ages manifested forth His glories, leaving the world in comparative darkness. But the promise was never forgotten that the kingdom of Christ should be for the blessing of all nations. On this day of Pentecost the note sounds clearly out: the Promise is for those afar off, even for all whom the Lord our God shall call. The glory of our Saviour's supremacy is this, that He is to be the Lord of the Dead and Living: not the Lord of one peculiar people, but the "Lord of all." You

know how His heart was evidently set upon this during the straitened days, and how His anticipation went forward to the coming of His subjects from the East and West and North and South into the kingdom of God, His own kingdom. The glory of Christ preached as a Saviour to the Gentiles is the mystery that was anciently hid till "these last times."

This day we celebrate the foundations of that kingdom. Though they were laid before, the building did not till now begin. It is with some sorrow mingled with the joy that we extol the bringing in of these last days of universal evangelisation. Centuries, almost millennia, have passed away, and these days do not seem much better than the former. Since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were! not precisely so, but this is only too near the truth. But the Pentecostal pledge has been given, and we know that the Gospel is going forth to every creature that is under heaven. Slowly but surely the great design is in process of accomplishment. Our Lord is winning His empire in every part of the world. True, the mystery of His present delay is as great as the mystery of His long preparation. But we are amidst all the signs of a growing purpose, and of a ripening fulfilment.

V. Lastly, this term as distinguishing the Christian dispensation suggests by the very form of it that time is to end with the accomplishment of God's designs by the Gospel.

Looking back upon the past we are taught that the whole series of divine dispensations is closed by the

Gospel economy. No other Prophet like unto Christ shall arise to follow Christ as Christ followed Moses. "Last of all," the Parable said, "He sent unto them His Son." The ministry of our Blessed Lord, the full discharge of which by the Holy Ghost we this day commemorate, can never give place to a better. It is true that many have said in past times and many are saying now, like John's disciples of all, "Art thou He that should finally come, or look we for Another?" There can be no other. The Trinity is exhausted. God can speak by no Higher than His Son. We have all and abound.

Nor will Christ Himself supersede the present dispensation by one that shall essentially change its character. You know that there are many waiters upon providence and interpreters of prophecy who show great impatience in regard to the evolution of the designs of these last days. They are weary of the old Gospel, and do not scruple to predict its entire collapse and failure. The Redeemer is to come—it may be very soon—and do by His Personal appearing what His Holy Spirit through the Word has failed to do. He will introduce a period of Millennial glory that shall have no direct connection with the church and its ministry and its means of grace. But we cannot reconcile this with our living now in the Last Days. Such millennial days would be the last preeminently and better than the Last, which is impossible. We live in the end of the world: not, indeed, literally, but in this sense that there will be no better times than these.

Then we must regard ourselves as living on the

threshold of time, if so it may be called, that shall not be measured by days. "Time shall be no longer." Eternity shall begin when the last days end. And that is the one prospect before us now. But there will be a last Day of the last Days: the day of our Lord's coming to judge the world. That judgment will end time, and for it we must all prepare. And, as there will be a last day of the last days of the world, so there will be a last day of our own Portion of it. It becomes us to bear this in mind, and to regard ourselves as always near the end of the age. Eternity is before the church, and each one of us is called to prepare for it: there is but a step between us and the end of all the abundant means of grace of which this day reminds us. Then let us, "knowing the time and that our salvation is nearer than when we believed," wait for and hasten unto the Great "Day of the Lord" that shall begin Eternity.