



Conditions
in the Past
and
Date Fixing

A. W. Pink

Conditions in the Past and Date Fixing

A. W. Pink

Conditions in the Past.

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is *no* new thing under the sun. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been *already* of old time, which was before us” (Eccl. 1:9, 10). How little is the plain testimony of these verses really believed today by many professing Christians, yea, how often is it contradicted both in pulpit and in pew by those who are thoroughly infatuated by what they style “the signs of the times.” If they hear or read of some wide-spread crime wave sweeping over a portion of the world, or some recently sprung-up cults of error which are fatally deceiving tens of thousands, or of a terrible epidemic of disease that is slaying large numbers of their fellows, they at once jump to the conclusion that nothing like it has ever happened before, and draw prophetic deductions from what they imagine is without precedent.

When the air is filled with rumours of war, and more so still when hostilities actually break forth, lovers of the sensational promptly quote Matthew 24:6-8 to show that the end of the age is upon us. If war be followed by famine, pestilence, and earthquakes in divers places, then appeal is promptly made to Revelation 6, with loud assertions that that prediction is now in course of fulfilment. The sad state of Christendom—with its unfaithful pulpits, rapidly decreasing church attendance, waning Sunday Schools, the increase of sham conversions, the decay of vital godliness—is cited as clear proof that the coming of the Lord is certain to take place in our own lifetime. The fearful spread of lawlessness on every side, the blatant defiance of moral standards, the almost universal desecration of the Sabbath, are often said to be without parallel in human history. Nevertheless God’s Word expressly declares “That which hath been is now; and that which is to be *hath already been*” (Eccl. 3:15).

Human nature has been the same in every age. The history of the New Testament era has been, in all its essential features but a

repetition of what occurred in Old Testament times. The prevalence of idolatry, the abounding of wickedness in every conceivable form, the frightfulness and frequency of wars, the failure of the masses to take to heart and profit from visitations of Divine judgment, the general refusal to heed the exhortations and expostulations of God's servants, and the low spirituality which obtained amongst the Lord's own people, are recorded in the Old Testament in letters of blood and tears. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Psa. 74:20)—to a much greater extent than now obtains. "Help, LORD, for the godly man *ceaseth*; for the faithful fail from among the children of men" (Psa. 12:1)—the godly have ever been an insignificant remnant. "Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law" (2 Chron. 15:3): this was in Old Testament times.

It is true there is an ebb and flow of the tide. The book of Judges supplies a striking illustration of this. Over and over again in that book the following order is seen: Israel sinning against the Lord, His selling them into the hands of their enemies, their crying to Him for relief, His delivering of them, and then their lapsing back into wickedness. Identically the same order is observable throughout the long history of Christendom. Frequently, Israel sank very low, and then God granted a gracious revival, which was followed by backsliding and spiritual deadness. In the time of Josiah, Hezekiah, and Ezra, there were radical reformations, but the effects of these soon spent themselves. In the days of David conditions were much better than under the reign of Saul, while under Ahab things were much worse than in the days of Solomon. Sometimes the restraining hand of God was more evidently placed upon the lusts of man, while at others it was more manifestly removed. Sometimes His Word went forth in mighty power; at others His servants cried "who hath believed our report?"

It is striking to note that immediately following the Scripture with which we began this article we read, "There is no remembrance of former things" (Eccl. 1:11). That is the trouble with our present age. *Conditions in the past are largely unknown today.* A generation has arisen which does little or no serious

reading, which are largely unacquainted with history, and unaware of the fact that present conditions are but a reduplication of those which have frequently obtained before. And “signs of the times” preachers trade upon their ignorance and credulity, making them suppose that much which is transpiring in the world is altogether extraordinary, that conditions now are such that they *cannot* go on much longer, that without any doubt the end of the age is upon us, and so on. But over against all such talk it stands written, “There is *no new thing* under the sun!”

It should prove an eye-opener to some of our readers to learn something of what has obtained in the past. Such an abundance of material is before us that we find it difficult to decide which portion of it to discard. It would cover far too much space were we to attempt a picture describing the outstanding features of each generation during the last eighteen centuries, so we will generalize the earlier ones, and enter into more detail upon those which followed the great Reformation of Luther. Here, too, we can only make a selection, dealing with the most prominent characteristics. As far as possible we shall avoid doing so in our own words, quoting from the writings of those who actually lived in those days, and giving book and page reference, so that any who wish to take the trouble of consulting a good public library, may verify for themselves.

“The Church’s story from the close of the New Testament Canon to the era of the Patristic theologians must be gleaned from the revelations their writings afford of its condition in their own time. Who can doubt that then, as in the days of Israel’s apostasy, there were many who feared the Lord and thought upon His name? But here I am speaking of the Church as a whole. Protestantism delights in attributing to the Romish apostasy the vices which disgraced the Church of Christendom during the Middle Ages; but in this regard the Church of Rome was merely the product and development of the much vaunted ‘primitive Church’ of the Fathers. Abundant proof of this will be found in the acts and words of some of the great and holy men who sought in vain to stem the evil tide. The facts are disclosed in various standard works: here of course a few characteristic extracts must suffice.

“The birth of Cyprian occurred about a century after the death of the last of the Apostles. Born and bred in Paganism, he was converted in middle age, and three years afterwards he became Bishop of Carthage. Ten years later he suffered Martyrdom in the Valerian persecution. The following words may indicate the condition of the Church in his time: ‘Serious scandals existed even among the clergy. Bishops were farmers, traders, and money-lenders, and by no means always honest. Some were too ignorant to teach the catechumens. Presbyters made money by helping in the manufacture of idols.’

“In Cyprian’s day ‘the virgins of the Church’ [‘nuns’ we call them now] were held in special honour on account of their reputed sanctity. What, then, passed for superior sanctity may be gleaned from the following words of that eminent and holy man: ‘What have the virgins of the Church to do at promiscuous baths, there to violate the commonest dictates of feminine modesty! The places you frequent are more filthy than the theatre itself; all modesty is there laid aside; and with your robes your personal honour and reserve are cast off.’

“Half a century before these words were written Clement of Alexandria had bewailed the low morality which prevailed among Christians, even at a time when, as he said, ‘the wells of martyrdom were flowing daily.’ Referring to then attendance at church he wrote: ‘After having waited upon God and heard of Him, they leave Him there, and find their pleasure without in ungodly fiddling, and love-songs, and what-not—stage plays and gross revelries.’

“The ‘conversion of Constantine’ set free the Church to put her house in order, and pursue her mission to the world without hindrance from without. But her condition in those halcyon days may be judged by the fact that at a single visitation the great Chrysostom deposed no fewer than thirteen bishops for simony (The buying or selling of ecclesiastical privileges) and licentiousness. Nor was this strange, having regard to the means by which men secured election to the Episcopal office. Here are Chrysostom’s words: ‘That some have filled the churches with murders, and made cities desolate when contending for *this*

position, I now pass over, lest I should seem to say what is incredible to say.’

“He was equally unsparing in dealing with the vices of the lower orders of the clergy. The natural result followed. The ‘historic Church’ convened a packed council, which deprived him of his archbishopric, and he was banished to Nicea. Moved, however, by the indignant fury of the laity, the Emperor recalled him, and his return to Constantinople was like a public triumph. But his fearless and scathing denunciations of the corruptions and immoralities of Church and Court led to the summoning of another council, more skilfully arranged; and his second banishment was intended to be, as in fact it proved, a death sentence. He practically died a martyr—one of the first of the great army whose blood cries to God for vengeance upon the ‘historic Church.’

“Nor were licentiousness and simony evils of recent growth in the Church; nor were they peculiar to the see of Chrysostom. In A.D. 370 an imperial edict was read in the churches of Rome, prohibiting clerics and monks from resorting to the houses of widows or female wards, and making them ‘incapable of receiving anything from the liberality or will of any woman to whom they may attach themselves under the plea of religion; and (the edict adds) any such donations or legacies as they shall have appropriated to themselves shall be confiscated.’

“This edict, sweeping though its terms were, had to be confirmed and strengthened by another twenty years later. And here is the comment of Jerome on the subject: ‘I blush to say it, heathen priests, players of pantomimes, drivers of chariots in the circus, and harlots are allowed to receive legacies; clergy and monks are forbidden to do so by Christian princes. Nor do I complain of the law (he adds), but I am grieved that we *deserve* it.’ According to Jerome, so great was the evil that men actually sought ordination in order to gain easier access to the society of women, and to trade upon their credulity. He, at least, maintains no reserve about the vices of the clergy of his day. And the picture he draws of the state of female society among the Christians is so repulsive that, as a recent writer remarks, we would gladly believe

it to be exaggerated, but (he adds), if the priesthood, with its enormous influence, was so corrupt, it is only too probable that it debased the sex which is always most under clerical influence.

“Of ‘Saint’ Cyril of Alexandria, Dean Milman writes: ‘while ambition, intrigue, arrogance, rapacity, and violence are proscribed as unchristian means; barbarity, persecution, bloodshed as unholy and unevangelical wickedness; posterity will condemn this orthodox Cyril as one of the worst of heretics against the spirit of the Gospel.’

“A kindly estimate this, of a man who was morally guilty of the murder of Hypatia, and who was a notorious mob leader, and the brutal persecutor of the Jews, whom he drove out of Alexandria by the thousands, giving up their houses to pillage. This turbulent pagan claims notice here only because he was the ruling spirit in the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 451), which dealt with the heresies of Nestorius. Cyril had hurled anathemas against him for refusing to acknowledge the Virgin Mary as the ‘Mother of God,’ and he procured his condemnation by means that would discredit the lowest political contest, including the free use of a hired mob. So disgraceful was the disorder which prevailed that the Emperor dissolved the Council with the rebuke: ‘God is my witness that I am not the author of this confusion. His providence will discover and punish the guilty. Return to your provinces, and may your private virtues repair the mischief and scandal of your meeting.’

“No one need suppose that a wider outlook would lead us to reverse the judgment to which these facts and testimonies point. A portly volume would not contain the evidence available to prove the utter apostasy of ‘the primitive Church of the Fathers.’ One more testimony, however, is all I will here adduce. In his early life Salvian of Marseilles was the contemporary of Jerome and Augustine, the greatest of all the Latin Fathers. A century had elapsed since ‘the conversion of Constantine.’ The ‘persecution’ which the Christians had most to fear from the State was due to their vices and crimes, and to the operation of penal laws of drastic severity, designed to prevent their lapsing back to paganism. Why was it, then, that God seemed to have forsaken the Church? Here is Salvian’s answer: ‘See what Christians actually

are everywhere, and then ask whether, under the administration of a righteous and holy God, such men can expect any favour? What happens every day under our very eyes is rather an evidence of the doctrine of Providence, as it displays the Divine displeasure provoked by the debauchery of the Church itself.’

“The following are further extracts from the same treatise: ‘How can we wonder that God does not hearken to our prayers? . . . Alas! how grievous and doleful is what I have to say! The very Church of God, which ought to be the appeaser of God, is but the provoked of God. And a very few excepted who flee from evil, what is almost every assembly of Christians but a sink of vices? For you will find in the Church scarcely one who is not either a drunkard or a glutton, or an adulterer, or a fornicator or frequenter of brothels, or a robber, or a murderer. I put it now to the consciences of all Christian people whether it be not so . . . The Churches are outraged by indecencies . . . You may well imagine what men have been thinking about at church when you see them hurry off, some to plunder, some to get drunk, some to practice lewdness, some to rob on the highway.’

“In accounting for the growth of Christianity in early days, Gibbon the Infidel gives prominence to the morality of the Christians. And Tertullian declared that no one who transgressed the rules of Christian discipline and propriety was recognized as a Christian at all. And yet two centuries later, almost every assembly of Christians had become a ‘sink of vices.’

“There is no need in this connection to speak of the Church of the Middle Ages—the fiendish enemy and persecutor of all who feared the Lord and followed righteousness and truth. The estimates formed of the number of the martyrs are unreliable; for though not one of those many millions is forgotten in Heaven, the records on earth are altogether faulty. This at least is certain, that for long ages God was on the side of the martyrs, and that the Church of Christendom was the most awful impersonation of the powers of Hell that earth has ever known” (From “Forgotten Truths” by Sir Robert Anderson, pages 88-96).

Much of the profligacy which obtained among professing Christians in the early centuries of this era is to be attributed unto

the decay of sound doctrine in the Church and the rise and spread of fundamental error, We give one quotation thereon: “There was another sort of heresies, and so of real apostasy from the mystery of the Gospel, whose authors and followers yet pretended an adherence unto and profession thereof. These may be reduced to two heads: (1). Concerning the Person; and (2). concerning the grace of Christ. Of the first sort, the principal and most prevalent was that of the Arians, in denying His Deity; the latter, that of the Pelagians, in opposing His satisfaction, merit, and grace.

“The first of these (in the fourth century) was poured out as a flood from the mouth of the old Serpent, and bore all before it like a torrent; the latter insinuated itself as poison into the very vitals of the Church. The first, as a burning fever, carried present death with it and before it; the latter, as a gangrene or heretical distemper, insensibly consumed the vital spirits of religion. In the first, we have a most woeful evidence of the instability of professors, and their readiness to forego the saving mysteries of the Gospel. For in little more than half an age after its first rise, the generality of Christians in the world, bishops, priests, and people, fell under the power of it, and in their public confessions renounced and denied the true eternal Deity of the Son of God. For having obtained the patronage of some emperors, as Constantius and Valens, and the suffrage of innumerable prelates, who jointly promoted this heresy by force and fraud—almost the whole world, as to outward profession, was for a season led into this apostasy, wherein some whole nations (as the Goths and Vandals) continued for sundry ages afterward. And for the latter, or Pelagianism, it secretly, subtly, and gradually so insinuated itself into the minds of men, that for the substance of it, it continues to be no small part of that religion which the generality of Christians do at this day profess” (John Owen, 1670, Volume 17, page 359). Arminianism is but a slightly refined Pelagianism.

When the superiority and supremacy of the bishop of Rome was acknowledged by the other bishops (at the beginning of the 7th century), the papacy rapidly developed and dominated the whole of Christendom. Romanism was a strange combination of Judaism and Paganism, thinly veiled by a Christian nomenclature.

Idolatrous in doctrine, corrupt in practice, withholding from the people the pure Word of God, and making its appeal to the lusts of the flesh, millions of adherents were secured, but at the cost of quenching the Spirit. Most significant is it that men from within her own pale testified to Rome's duplicity and wickedness. We quote from one such witness in the 11th century.

“Woe to this generation which hath the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. If indeed that should be called hypocrisy, which now through its prevalence cannot be hid, and through its impudence seeks not to be hid. At present, rottenness and corruption affects the whole body of the Church, and the wider it spreads, the more desperate; and the more inwardly it spreads the more dangerous; for if an *heretic*, an open enemy, should rise up, he would be cast out; if a violent enemy, she (i.e., the Church), would perhaps conceal herself from him. But now, whom shall the Church cast out? or whom shall she hide herself from? All are friends, and all are enemies; all are in mutual connection as relations, yet in mutual contests as adversaries; all are fellow-members of one family, yet none are promoters of peace; all are neighbours, yet all are seekers of their own things; by profession servants of Christ, in reality they serve Antichrist; they make an honourable figure by the good things they have received from the Lord, while, at the same time, they give no honour to the Lord” (Bernard, sermon 33 on Canticles).

After the rise and domination of Romanism there followed what has been aptly termed “the Dark Ages,” for that Word of God which is to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, was publicly put out. Nevertheless, from the 7th to the 14th centuries God by no means left Himself without witnesses on earth. Claude in Italy and Gootschalk (old German for “the servant of God”) in Saxony preached the doctrine of grace in the 9th century. In the 11th century the Waldenses were active in evangelism all through the Alps. In England such men as Bede, King Alfred the Good, Anselm and Bradwardine (archbishops of Canterbury) in the 11th and 14th centuries and Wycliffe are well-known names. Peter Lombard and John Huss in Bohemia were mighty instruments in the hands of God long before the days of Luther and Calvin.

It is unnecessary for us to write about the grand Reformation of the 16th century, but it will be pertinent to give one brief quotation to show the almost incredible vileness of human nature as evidenced in the awful persecution to which the people of God were then subjected. Foxe's book of Martyrs chronicles the murderous deeds of Rome in this country, but it is not so well-known what wholesale butchery took place in France. In his "History of Redemption," Jonathan Edwards (a most cautious writer) says, "It is reckoned that about this time (1572) within thirty years there were martyred in France for the Protestant religion, 39 Princes, 148 Counts, 2,346 Barons, 147,518 Gentlemen, and 760,000 of the common people." Were such a colossal tragedy to occur today how "students of prophecy" would make capital out of it! We spare our readers' feelings by refraining from a detailed account of the barbarous methods employed in torture—far worse than any we have read that the Bolshevists use.

What we are now more concerned with is to observe *the ebb* of the Reformation tide and the rapid decay of piety which soon followed. "Go through all places, it shall be found that scarce one of a thousand in his dealings makes conscience of a lie: a great part of men get their wealth by fraud and oppression, and all kinds of unjust and unmerciful dealings . . . This doth appear to be true, by the practice and behaviour of men on the Lord's day: if the number of those which come to hear God's Word were compared with those which run about their worldly wealth and pleasure, I fear me the better sort would be found to be a little handful to a large heap, or as a drop to the ocean in respect of the other . . . Like to him (Herod) are many in these days, which gladly desire to hear the Gospel of Christ preached, only because they would hear speech of some strange things, laying aside all care and conscience to obey that which they hear. Yea, many in England delight to read the strange histories of the Bible, and therefore can rehearse the most part of it, yet come to the *practice* of it, the same persons are commonly found as bad in life and conversation, or rather *worse* than others . . . A rare thing it is to find the virtue of fidelity in the world now a-days: who is he that makes conscience of a lie? and is not truth banished out of our coasts?" (W. Perkins,

1595, Volume 1, pages 129, 154, 201, 275).

“Our lives shame us: open and manifest iniquities proclaim us unthankful. Fraud in our homes, drunkenness in our streets, oppression in our fields, adulteries in corners, corruption on benches . . . Irreligious and profane: other times have been notable for this, *ours* is notorious; the lusts of the flesh, if ever, are now manifest. Drunkenness reels in the streets, gluttony desires not to be housed. Bribery opens his hand to receive in the very courts. Robbery and murder swagger in the highways. Whoredom begins to neglect curtains, and grows proud of its impudence” (Thomas Adams, 1605, Volume 1, pages 131, 145).

“In 1623 Charles the First revived his father’s edict for allowing sports and recreations on Sunday to such as attended public worship, and he ordered his proclamation for that purpose to be read by the clergy after Divine service. Those who were puritanically affected refused obedience, and were suspended or deprived. Such encouragement and protection which the king and the bishops gave to wakes, church-ales, bride-ales, and other church festivals of the common people, were objects of scorn to the Puritan” (Hume the historian). There are few indeed today who have any conception of the fearful profligacy of that monarch’s court, the open immoralities which obtained in high places, the corruption of the law-courts, and the wickedness which abounded among the common people.

The servants of God who faithfully reproved and rebuked were no more popular then than they are now. Those who have uncompromisingly denounced wickedness, bade their hearers or readers repent of it, and threatened the everlasting wrath of God if they did not, have ever been unwelcome—thorns in the side of all who hate to have their consciences searched. “If a preacher reproves sin, he is thought to do it out of harshness or to be too bitter and uncharitable, and they say he should preach God’s love and mercy. Reprehension of sin is most condemned and least esteemed. But let a preacher preach dark mysteries and curious inventions, or odd conceits, and he will be widely welcomed” (Henry Smith, 1590, Volume 2, page 213).

In his comments upon “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let

your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (James 4:9), Thomas Manton (1660) said, “Frothy spirits love their pleasure and ease: ‘The fool’s heart is in the House of mirth’ (Eccl. 7:4). A loose, garish spirit doth not love to converse with mournful objects, or to be pressed to mourning duties. It showeth how instant and earnest we should be in pressing such duties as these: ‘weep,’ ‘mourn,’ ‘be afflicted.’ It is one of the fancies now in fashion that men would be altogether honeyed and oiled with grace; the wholesome severities of religion are distasteful. Some that would be taken for Christians of the highest form, are altogether prejudiced against such a doctrine as this is, and think we are *legal* when we press humiliation. How may the poor ministers of the Gospel go to God, and say as Moses did, ‘The children of Israel have not hearkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me?’ Lord, the professors will not brook such doctrine as this is, how shall we hope to prevail with the poor, blind, carnal world? Certainly it is very sad that that which was wont to be a badge of profaneness, men should now adopt it into their religion. I mean, *scoffing* at doctrines of *repentance* and humiliation” (Volume 14, page 374).

How shocked and saddened we are by what we now behold in the rising generation: their dislike of work, their mad craze for pleasure, their chaffing at all restraint. Yet the profligacy of youth and the present-day immodesty of the female sex, is *no new thing*. No, not even the modern craze of women bobbing their hair. Writing in 1620, Thomas Fuller, the Church Historian, said, “We see so many women so strangely disguised with fantastic fashions, yea, so many of them affecting man-like clothes and *shorn hair*, it is hard to discern the sex of a woman through the attire of a man.”

“I have often marvelled at your youth, and said in my heart, What should be the reason that they should be so generally at this day debauched as they are? For they are now *profane to amazement*; and sometimes I have thought one thing, and sometimes another. At last I have thought of this: How if God, whose ways are past finding out, should suffer it to be so now, that He might make of some of them the more glorious saints hereafter? I know sin is of the Devil, but it cannot work in the

world without permission; and if it happens to be as I have thought, it will not be the first time that the Lord hath caught Satan in his own design. For my part, I believe the time is at hand that we shall see better saints in the world than have been seen for many a day. And this *vileness*, that at present does so much *swallow up our youth*, is one cause of my thinking so” (John Bunyan, about 1655, out of “The Jerusalem Sinner Saved”).

In the account of her experiences, Mrs. Brine, wife of John Brine, minister at Cripplegate, wrote, “Thus I went on near fifteen years of age, about which time (A.D. 1700) it pleased God to awaken me, and bring me to consider what state I was in. One night, being in my usual manner at play with my companions, and hearing them swear at a sad rate, taking the Lord’s name in vain in *almost every sentence* they spoke; this I thought was not right in them, though I myself had much ado to keep from bad expressions” (from the collected writings of J. Brine, Volume 1, page 544). “Were children and youth ever more disposed to despise and abuse pious parental instruction, than at this day?” (about 1760). “Where is pious, parental instruction and faithfulness more despised and abused than in this place? Is there scarcely a pious child or youth to be found, even in religious families?” (Sermons of Nathaniel Emmons, Volume 2, page 122, Franklin, Mass., U.S.A.).

“Some of old thought that because they could cry, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,’ that therefore they were delivered, or had dispensation to do the abominations which they committed. For who (say they) have a right to the creatures, if not Christians, if not church members? and from this conclusion, let go the reins of their inordinate affections after pride, gluttony, pampering themselves without fear, daubing themselves with the lust-provoking fashions of the times; to walk with stretched out necks, naked breasts, frizzled foretops, wanton gestures, in gorgeous apparel” (John Bunyan from the “Barren Fig Tree”). ““The Apostle biddeth the women to cover their heads because of the angels’ (1 Cor. 11:10), their fashion being to come into the congregation with loose dishevelled locks; he mindeth them of the presence of the angels. We may use a like argument to women to

cover their naked breasts, now their immodesty is grown so impudent as to out-face the ordinances of God” (Manton, Volume 5, page 250).

Today the godly are grieved by the lack of reality and genuineness in so many bearing the name of Christ—bemoaning the fact that so very few who claim to believe His Gospel give evidence in their daily lives that they have taken His yoke upon them. But *the abounding of empty professors is no new thing*, as the following quotations will show. “In this respect may these also be called ‘the outward court,’ who with impudence do arrogate to themselves the name of the Church, and under that name do in some places cast out the true worshippers; and who, by reason of their number—the *best* congregations of the first Reformation consisting of many more apparently bad than good—and many of those churches having none but men *unregenerate*” (Thomas Goodwin, about 1680, Volume 3, page 126).

“This is that apostasy which the Christian world groans under at this day (about 1660), and which, as is it is to be feared, will bring the judgments of God upon it. The very profession of piety is much lost, yea, much derided amongst many. . . Duties of holiness, strictness of conversation, communication unto edification are not only neglected, but *scorned*. It is in many places a lost labour to seek for Christianity among Christians; and the degeneracy seems to be *increasing* every day” (John Owen, Volume 17, page 475). “How few among the many, yea, among the swarms of professors, have heart to make conscience of walking before God in this world, and to study His glory among the children of men! How few, I say, have His name lying nearer their hearts than their own carnal concerns! Nay, do not many make His Word, His name, and His ways, a stalking-horse to their own worldly advantages? God calls for faith, good conscience, moderation, self-denial, humility, heavenly-mindedness, love to saints, and to enemies, and for conformity in heart and life to His will: but *where is it?*” (John Bunyan from “The Strait Gate”).

“In those who enjoy the Gospel, profess the embracement of it, and yet continue *unfruitful*, none of all this appears. The world may make use of such barren souls as arguments that the Gospel is

no such excellent doctrine, has no such Divine power or efficacy, produces no such desirable effects. For why? No such thing is visible in the temper of *multitudes who profess* that they believe it. They are but like other men, and exceed not many who were *never* acquainted with the Gospel: no more humble, no more holy, no more self-denying, no more public-spirited, no more heavenly-minded, no more mortified as to many lusts and passions, no more crucified to the world as to the riches, delights, and splendour of it, no more candid and sincere in dealings, no more merciful, no more active to do good in the world, no more fruitful in good works; and where is then the singular excellency and power of the Gospel? The light of nature has been effectual in some to restrain them from those enormities, from which many that enjoy the Gospel abstain not. O what dishonourable reflections doth this cast upon the glorious Gospel of Christ” (David Clarkson, 1680, Volume 2, page 397).

“We seem to grow weary of the name of Christ; and in the end of time mockers and atheistical spirits swarm everywhere; and the holy, meek, sober, humble, heavenly spirit seemeth to be *banished* out of the Christian world, but that a few broken-hearted souls keep it up. Partialities and sects are countenanced, while unquestionable duties are little regarded, except by those few who have the courage to live in a counter-motion to the practices of a *loose age*, by their holiness and serious regard to the hopes of another world” (Thomas Manton, Volume 15, page 309). “Our times may very justly be esteemed ‘perilous’—difficult, troublesome, and dangerous; for many, who are of the religious profession, are manifestly under the influence of such vices as the Apostle in that place (2 Tim. 3) enumerates. Some are captivated by one, and others by other vices . . . In my opinion, they who make pretences to religion in words but in their behaviour are any way irregular, are the most dangerous companions a good man can intimately converse with—because he may be tempted to think that there is not much evil in this or that irregular practice through a charitable judgment he forms of the persons addicted to those practices . . .

“We have *lost* the chief glory of the Reformation, and the very

life and soul of popery greatly flourishes amongst us, to our great scandal and the satisfaction of the Romanists. This is the dreadful condition of a multitude of those who pass under the denomination of Protestant Dissenters; and what will be the issue of these things, the Lord only knows . . . But *few* are careful to keep up *family worship*. There is reason to fear that it is very rarely practiced by many who would be thought to be Christians. The late hours of our clubs, which call for our attendance almost every evening, will not allow us time to give God thanks for the mercies of the day, to confess our sins to Him, and entreat His protection in the night in the presence of our children and servants. If worship is performed in the family at all, it is on the evening of the Lord's Day, when alehouses cannot enjoy our company with any decency. This was not always the case; Professors formerly did not behave themselves in this manner; we are *much degenerated* in our conduct" (John Brine, about 1740, Volume 1, pages 306, 7, 14, 27).

"The Apostle Paul complained of professors who walked not according to the Gospel. There has been occasion for the same complaint ever since; *but never more than the present*. Many walk at this day who make some profession of Christ and yet never attain to any steadfastness, but are tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine; and at last come to nothing. Others, pretending to be better settled, attain to some form of godliness, but are without the life and power of it; they appear to have some notions about the way of righteousness, but not being taught them of God, nor ever brought under the mighty influence of them their walk is very uneven, and generally in the end brings great scandal upon the name and cause of Christ. We have also many at this day who set out in the ways of religion who never felt the plague of their own hearts; these are commonly very confident and presumptuous; they make a shining profession and go on with great parade until they be tried, and then, in the time of temptation, they fall away" (William Romaine, about 1770, "The Walk of Faith," page 4).

"With all the preaching and printing 'tis but few indeed who know Christ and the power of His resurrection. I have been, you

are, tried to the heart, to see how few know Him and have their minds enlightened by the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. Yet so it is, but here and there a person is really taken with the Lord” (S.E. Pierce’s Letters, 1796). “There are but few who have their minds enlightened so as to see the worth and beauty of the Lord Jesus. You may very easily discern it in conversation with the generality of professors: to get money is more with very many than to converse with Christ” (Ibid. 1808). “In some places I have found those who are alive to these great things, but the state of the Church of Christ is very low: truth very little known, less beloved and received than is commonly apprehended; anything and everything seems to go down except the truth as it is in Jesus. It is a great honour to live in *such* times as the present, *when sin is rampant*, and errors and heresies of all sorts abound—because the grace of God in preserving the feet of His saints, in keeping them alive in Christ, and delivering them from making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, is the more clearly evidenced” (Ibid. 1820).

There is nothing more outstanding today in the sad state of Christendom than *the abounding of empty professors* (those with a non-saving or dead faith), and as so many suppose that this is a certain precursor of the Great Apostasy which will mark the terminal of this age, we give further quotations to show that identically the same feature has prominently marked other generations in the past. “Christ is a Lord to command us to walk in the way of life. The fault of our times is that multitudes profess Christ, yet many allow of no Christ but of their own devising, namely, a Christ that must be a Saviour to deliver from Hell, but not a Lord to command them; *that* they cannot brook . . . Faith was never more professed, yet there was never less true faith” (Perkins, Volume 2, pages 163, 230). And this, be it noted, was in the palmy days of the Reformation!

“These are days wherein we have as sad and tremendous examples of apostasy, backsliding, and falling from high and glorious pitches in profession, as any age can parallel. As many washed swine returning to their mire, and as many Demases going after the present evil world, and men going out from the church

which were never truly and properly of it, as many sons of the morning and children of high illumination and gifts sitting in darkness, and that of all sorts; as ever in so short a space of time since the name of Christ was known upon the earth. What through the deviating of some to the ways of the world, and the lusts of the flesh; what of others, to spiritual wickedness and abominations; it is seldom that we see a professor to hold out in the glory of his profession to the end” (John Owen, Volume 6, page 123).

“It were enough to excite a smile if the subject was not too serious for laughter, to behold the seeming zeal with which numbers in the present day (A.D. 1800) are hastening to convert *others*, many of whom, it is to be feared, were never converted *themselves*; and to hear the indignation expressed by many against infidels, who, as far as relates to any saving work of grace wrought upon their own souls, are no less infidels under a different bearing. All such Christians are Christians only by system. Their creed is derived from their fathers, and is either the effect of habit or education” (Robert Hawker, Volume 7, page 500). As it is now, so it was then; as it was then, so it is now—thousands of nominal Christians engaged in “personal” and “missionary” work, who are ignorant of some of the most rudimentary principles of the Faith, working merely in the energy of the flesh.

How the true servant of God bemoans the *lack of response* today unto faithful preaching, the stolid indifference of his hearers: neither the terrors of the Law nor the attractions of the Gospel making any impression. Elderly evangelists are complaining how much rarer genuine conversions are now than they were thirty years ago. But this is no new thing. “This age is miserable if we regard the practice of faith and repentance which God requireth: for men live in ignorance, without knowledge, they go on in looseness of life without reformation, which is both odious to God and scandalous to men; not one in an hundred turn to God at the preaching of His Word, renewing his ways by daily repentance” (Perkins, Volume 3, page 249). “How many have melting hearts when they hear God blasphemed and the religion of Christ wronged? How few are there that yield to the motions of

the Spirit! We may take up a wonderful complaint of the hardness of men's hearts in these days, who never tremble at the Word of God. Neither His promises, nor threatenings, nor commands, will melt their hearts" (R. Sibbes, about 1630, Volume 6, page 40).

"We are fallen into times in which the thing and doctrine of it is forgotten and laid aside, in which there are multitudes of professors but few converts, many that seem to walk in the way of life, but never came in at the strait gate. There is a zeal amongst us to advance this or that reformation in religion, and it hath been all the cry. But, my brethren, where is *regeneration* called for or regarded? We have seen the greatest outward alterations that ever were in any age; kingdoms turned and converted into commonwealths, the powers of Heaven and earth shaken; but men, although they turn this way and that, from this or that way, from this opinion to that, yet their hearts generally turn upon the same hinges they were hung upon when they came into this world. In this University of Oxford we have had puttings out and puttings in, but where is putting off the old man and putting on the new? Where do we hear (as we did formerly) of souls carrying home the Holy Spirit from sermons, of their being changed and made new, and of students running weeping to their studies crying out 'What shall I do to be saved?' This was heretofore a common cry. Conversion is the only standing miracle in the Church, but I may truly say this miracle is *well-nigh ceased*; we hear of few of them" (Thomas Goodwin, 1670, Volume 6, page 157).

Nor is the low state of spirituality which now obtains so generally amongst those we have reason to believe *are* the Lord's people, any new thing. "O that this union among saints was more conspicuous and evident. But with grief of heart be it spoken, little is to see of that, whilst much of that which is the opposite to it is everywhere too apparent. What schisms, rents, divisions are to be found even amongst the Lord's people" (J. Jacombe, 1647, page 55). "The English Christians heretofore were famous for their strict walking, constant communion with God, undaunted zeal, sweet experiences, holy conferences and communications, whereas now we meet with but such as are, like the vain men of Israel, of a light spirit, loose conversation; given to vain

wranglings and disputes, more than to practicing a holy life, and measuring religion not so much by the power of godliness as by form and faction, and siding with parties” (Thomas Manton, Volume 5, page 424).

“We are departed from the Lord, and the Lord is in great measure departed from us. What a woeful withering wind has blown upon God’s vineyard in the land! We are fallen from our first love, our former zeal for God and His precious truths, and the royalties of our Redeemer’s crown. And is there not a lamentable decay as to the power and life of godliness, which has dwindled away into an empty form with the most? To conclude, it is not with the nobles, gentry, ministers, or people in Scotland, as once in a day it has been; and the worst of it is, that though it be so, though gray hairs are here and there upon us, yet we do not perceive it: we make our faces harder than a rock, and refuse to return to the Lord” (Ebenezer Erskine, about 1760, Volume 1, page 112).

“We live in a day when the love of many (of whom we would hope the best), is, at least, grown very cold. The effects of a narrow, suspicious, censorious and selfish spirit are but too evident amongst professors of the Gospel. If I were to insist at large upon the offenses of this kind which abound amongst us, I should seem almost reduced to the necessity either of retracting what I have advanced, or of maintaining that a great part (if not the greatest part) of those who profess to know the Lord, are deceiving themselves with a form of godliness, being destitute of its power: for though they may abound in knowledge and gifts, and have much to say upon the subject of Christian experience, they appear *to lack* the great, the inimitable, the indispensable criterion of true Christianity, *a love to the brethren*; without which all other seeming advantages and attainments are of no good” (John Newton, 1770, Volume 1, page 180). “Whether the present age be worse than others which have preceded it, I shall not determine [wise man!], but this is manifest, that it abounds not only in infidelity and profligacy, but with great numbers of loose characters among professing Christians. Even of those who retain a decency of character, many are sunk into a *Laodicean*

lukewarmness” (Andrew Fuller, 1810, Volume 4, page 355).

Reference has previously been made to the fearful profligacy of the court of Charles the First, and the open wickedness which prevailed generally in this land throughout his reign. Under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell conditions greatly improved, but after his demise (in 1658) and upon the enthronement of Charles the Second, the rivers of evil soon broke their banks, spreading moral desolation far and wide. “Few have any idea of the flood of ungodliness and profanity which characterized the reign of Charles II. It was not merely libertinism and the most unblushing profligacy which stalked abroad in open day, but the most avowed infidelity and coarsest profaneness. It was as if all Hell had broken loose; and as if ungodliness, chained up by the iron hand of Cromwell, would now take its full swing, and make ample amends for past deprivations. The Puritans, called so derisively from their purity of principle and conduct, were hooted down, and driven from society as disturbers of the public peace” (The Gospel Standard, 1852, page 334).

“Alas, do not many prop up themselves in some earthly thing, as if there were no God in Israel to be sought unto; strengthening themselves in their own righteousness, as if there were no Mediator . . . I am sore afraid that most of the knowledge of God and Christ we have in this age (1670) is a mere notion of faith without value, like a ring without the diamond” (Stephen Charnock, Volume 4, page 58). In his dedication of George Swinnock’s “The Beauty of Magistracy,” Thomas Hall, addressing “All the prudent, zealous, and magnanimous Magistrates, Judges, and Gentry in England, Scotland, and Ireland, in September, 1659, began: ‘My Lords, and Gentlemen’—The dedication of this treatise was intended for the Parliament, but that being dissolved, it most properly falls to you, who are, under God, the pillars of the state. *Such is the corruption of the times* we live in, that we are put to dispute every inch of the way with enemies of truth—Magistracy, ministry, Sabbaths, sacraments, Trinity, Scriptures: all things are now questioned, nothing believed or practiced by many.” (George Swinnock’s Works, Vol. 4, page 147).

“How is this land filled with sin, yea, with the worst of sins,

against the Holy One of Israel. Hell seems to be broken loose, and men try to exceed, and excel one another in all kinds of wickedness. Oh the scarlet sins that are now to be found under many scarlet robes! [Romanist Bishops.] Oh the black transgressions that are now to be found under many black cassocks! [Priests.] Oh the new-found oaths, the hellish blasphemies, the horrible filthiness, and abominable debaucheries that are committed daily in the face of the sun! How shameless, how senseless are sinners grown in these days! Sin everywhere now appears with a whore's forehead. What open opposition does Christ meet with in His Gospel, offices, members, ways, worship, and works! How does all iniquity abound, and how bold and resolute are multitudes now in dishonouring of God, in polluting His ordinances, in destroying their own souls, and in treasuring up of wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5)! But the worse the times are, the better every Christian must labour to be; the more profane the age is wherein we live, the more holy must we endeavour to be" (Thomas Brooks, 1650, Volume 4, page 364).

"Wickedness like a flood is like to drown our English world; it begins already to be above the tops of the mountains; it has almost swallowed up all: our youth, our middle age, old age. O debauchery, debauchery, what hast thou done in England! Thou hast corrupted our young men, hast made our old men beasts; thou hast deflowered our virgins, and hast made numerous whores; thou hast made our earth to reel to and fro like a drunkard; it is in danger to be removed like a cottage; yea, it is, because transgression is so heavy upon it, like to 'fall and rise no more' (Isa. 24:20). O that I could mourn for England, and for the sins that are committed therein, even while I see that, without repentance, the men of God's wrath are about to deal with us (Ezek. 9:1, 2). Well, I have written, and by God's assistance shall pray, that this flood may abate in England; and could I but see the tops of the mountains above it, I should think these waters were abating.

"It is the duty of those that can, to cry out against this deadly plague; yea, to lift up their voice as with a trumpet against it, that men may be awakened about it, fly from it, as from that which is

the greatest evils. Sin pulled angels out of Heaven, pulls men down to Hell, and overthroweth kingdoms. Who that sees the land in danger, will not set the beacons on a flame? Who that sees the devils as roaring lions continually devouring souls, will not make an outcry? But above all, when we see sin, sinful sin, swallowing up a nation, sinking of a nation, and bringing its inhabitants to temporal; spiritual, and eternal ruin, shall we not cry out, ‘They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink; they are intoxicated with deadly poison of sin, which will, if its malignity be not by wholesome means allayed, bring soul and body, estate and country, and all, to ruin and destruction’” (John Bunyan, 1660, from “The Life and Death of Mr. Badman”). And for such faithful witnessing Bunyan was cast into prison.

One of the saddest features of our day is the blatant and almost universal desecration of the Holy Sabbath. Yet other ages besides ours have been cursed with the same fearful sin. “Men make this their business: they will be rich, and hence it is they are not only unmerciful to themselves in wearing and wasting their own spirits with carking cares, but to such also as they employ; neither regarding the souls or bodies of men: scarce affording them the liberty of the Lord’s Day (as has been too common in our Newfoundland employments), or if they have it, yet they are so worn out with incessant labours that that precious time is spent either in sleep or idleness. It is no wonder God gives you more rest than you would have, since that day of rest hath been no better improved. This over-doing hath not been the least cause of our undoing” (John Flavel, 1660, Volume 5, page 272). It has long been our own conviction that the frequent spectacle of millions of artisans, in different countries, being out of work, *is a Divine judgment* for so much labour upon His day.

“In these late years how has profaneness, like a flood, broke in upon us on the Lord’s Day! And therefore it highly concerns all the profaners of God’s Sabbath to lay their hands upon their hearts, and to say, The Lord is righteous, the Lord is righteous, though He has laid our habitations desolate. Who is so great a stranger in our English Israel as not to know that God was more dishonoured on the Sabbath, within and without the walls of

London, than He was in all the other six days of the week? and therefore let us not think it strange that such a fire (the terrible fire of London in 1666) was kindled on that day as has reduced all to ashes. What antic habits did men and women put on, on this day! What frothy, empty discourses and intemperance was to be found at many men's tables this day! How were ale-houses, stews, and Moorfields filled with debauched sinners this day! No wonder then if London be laid desolate" (Thomas Brooks, 1667, Volume 6, page 114).

We are not unmindful of the fact that some evilly-minded persons may be inclined to turn to a wrong use of what has been advanced, making the same a cloak for their own carnality, arguing that *they* are no worse, nay, not so bad as many who lived in by-gone days. Nor must Christians persuade themselves that they are obliged to swim with the tide, that in view of the degeneracy of our days it cannot be expected that they should be as godly and fruitful as if they had lived during a time of spiritual revival. Let each of us earnestly endeavour to take to heart and turn into fervent prayer those timely words of Thomas Brooks, "The worse the times are, the better every Christian must labour to be; the more profane the age wherein we live, the more holy must we endeavour to be."

Nor are we unmindful of another danger. In discovering that the evils of our decadent age are but fresh outbursts of those moral and spiritual diseases which have often plagued previous generations, we lose or lessen our horror and sorrow over the wickedness which now stalks through the world. May God graciously deliver us from stoical indifference at the sad sights which now stare us in the face on every hand. God has promised a special blessing to those who "sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done" in our land (Ezek. 9:4). Let us seek to drink more deeply into the spirit of Him who wept over Jerusalem. Finally, let us marvel and adore the infinite patience of Him who "bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

It will be observed that most of the quotations in the previous article were taken from writers of the seventeenth century, that is,

when Puritanism was in its heyday. If, then, during the time that sound preaching and vital godliness flourished most in these favoured Isles, wickedness also held high carnival, why should it be thought strange that in our day—when faithful preaching and personal piety are at a discount—sin is in the saddle and lawlessness abounds on every side? But to continue our review of conditions in the past. Bad as the seventeenth century was, the eighteenth was far worse. No human pen can adequately depict the moral degeneracy and the spiritual stagnation of its first five decades. Page after page might be filled with quotations from the few men of God who lived then. A brief selection must suffice.

Upon the abdication of James II, Prince William of Orange was invited to occupy the English throne, for the surer establishment of Protestantism. Describing the assembling of the English gentry to welcome him to London, Lord Macauley wrote, “The attractions must have been great, for the risks of the journey were not trifling. The peace had, all over Europe, and nowhere more than in England, turned crowds of soldiers into marauders. Several aristocratic equipages had been attacked, even in Hyde Park. One day the British mail was robbed, another day the Dover coach. On Hounslow Heath a company of horsemen with masks over their faces watched for the great people who had been to pay their court to the King at Windsor.

“There are few periods in the history of the world that have been marked by deeper spiritual darkness than the commencing part of the eighteenth century. From 1700 to 1750 seemed to have lapsed into lifeless formality, and this, together with the matured abominations of Popery, opened the way for that tide of infidelity of which the French Revolution was the manifested result. The latter part of the eighteenth century was, through the Lord’s great mercy, marked by a very decided revival of evangelical truth. The effect of the writings and preachings of Whitefield, Romaine, Newton, and others, was widely felt in Europe and America” (B. W. Newton, “Aids to Prophetic Enquiry,” first series, page 3).

“The darkest period which the church of God in this country has ever seen since the Reformation was in the reign of Queen Anne. Dissent had obtained a legal footing at the Revolution of 1688.

From that era commenced the decline of vital religion till the time of Whitefield. The eighteenth century arose in the thickest cloud that has overspread this country since Popery fell. We live, it is true, in a day of much spiritual declension; but *things were much worse then*. Nearly all the Dissenting churches were sunk into Arianism (which denied the Godhead both of Christ and the Holy Spirit). Little else but dead morality was heard in pulpits where free grace was formerly proclaimed. Religion, in fact, had sunk so low that when Whitefield went about proclaiming the new birth, it was a doctrine as new to the Dissenters as to the adherents of the National Establishment. A national religion was the order of the day, and as much preached in the chapel as in the church” (The Gospel Standard, 1852, page 336).

“Another thing wherein the state of things is altered for the worse from what it was in the times of the Reformation, is the prevalency of licentiousness in principles and opinions. There is not now that spirit of orthodoxy which there was then; there is very little appearance of zeal for the mysteries and spiritual doctrines of Christianity; and they never were so ridiculed and held in contempt as they are in the present age, and especially in England, the principal kingdom of the Reformation. In that kingdom, those principles on which the power of godliness depends, are in a great measure exploded; and Arianism and Socinianism, Arminianism and Deism, are the things which prevail and carry almost all before them. History records no age wherein there was so great an apostasy of those who had been brought up under the light of the Gospel to infidelity; never was there such a casting off of Christianity and all revealed religion, never any age when it was so much scoffed at and the Gospel of Christ ridiculed” (Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1, page 471). Nor were conditions, generally, any better in the U.S.A. at that period.

“Surely the Lord has a controversy with this land; and there hardly can be a period assigned in the annals of the ages, when it was more expedient or seasonable for those who fear Him to stir up each other to humiliation and prayer than at present. What is commonly called our National Debt is swelled to an enormous greatness. It may be quickly expressed in figures; but a person

must be something versed in calculation to form a tolerable idea of accumulated millions. But what arithmetic is sufficient to compute the immensity of our National Debt in a *spiritual* sense? or, in other words, the amount of our *national sins*? The spirit of infidelity, which, for a time, distinguished comparatively few, and, like a river, was restrained within narrow bounds, has of late years broken down its banks and deluged the land. This wide-spreading evil has, in innumerable instances, as might be expected, emboldened the natural heart against the fear of God, hardened it to an insensibility of moral obligation, and strengthened its prejudices against the Gospel. The consequence has been that profligate wickedness is becoming almost as universal as the air we breathe and is practiced with little more reserve or secrecy than the transactions of common business, except in such instances as would subject the offender to the penalty of human laws. O the unspeakable patience of God!

“The multiplied instances of impiety, blasphemy, cruelty, adultery, villainy, and abominations not to be thought of without horror, under which this land groans, are only known to Him who knoweth all things. There are few sins which imply greater contempt of God, or a more obdurate state of mind in the offender, than *perjury*, yet the guilt of it is so little regarded, and temptations to it so very frequent, that perhaps I do not go too far in supposing there are more deliberate acts of perjury committed amongst us than among the rest of mankind taken together. Though some of the Roman poets and historians have given very dark pictures of the times they lived in, their worst descriptions of this kind would hardly be found exaggerated if applied to our own. But what are the sins of heathens, if compared with the like evils perpetrated in a land bearing the name of Christian, favoured with the Word of God, the light of the Gospel, and enjoying the blessings of civil and religious liberty and peace in a higher degree, and for a longer continuance, than was afforded to any people of whose history we have heard?” (John Newton, Volume 1, page 197).

In his “Foolish Virgins Described,” William Huntington (1797) wrote, “We have more need to fear a certain army in the bowels of

our own country, than all the combined forces on the frontiers (i.e. of Napoleon) . . . the daily elopement of women from their husbands, and the unclean spirit of whoredom that so universally reigns and rules among the higher classes . . . Another thing I fear is the threatened stroke of judgment upon *the oppressor*. The last hard frost gave the coal merchant his opportunity to grind the face of the poor to the utmost, which will never be forgotten by the days of this generation. The year following, the whole staff of life was confined in the hands of the farmer, the monopolist, and the miller, who exhibited such hardness of heart, covetousness, and cruel oppression, as is not to be found in the annals of history” (Volume 2, page 568). So that “cornering” of food and unjust “profiteering” is no new thing.

Spiritual conditions in Scotland at this same period may be readily visualized from the following quotation. “The darkness of a dead, blasted, profane, or ignorant ministry prevails upon the withholding of the lamp of God’s Anointed. Indeed God may leave something in the land called the Gospel, and a set of men who call themselves ministers of the Gospel. But what sort of a lamp is it that is left, when the true Gospel lamp is taken away? It is the Devil’s lamp; it is not the narrow way, but a broad-way lamp, to set folk straightway to the bottomless pit. And what sort of ministers or lamp-bearers are left? Why, they are blind guides leading the blind, and both fall into the ditch together” (Ebenezer Erskine, Volume 2, page 285).

Perhaps the reader would inquire, Do you, then, wish to make out that conditions now are better, or at least no worse, than they were in the past? That expression “the past,” dear friend, is entirely a relative one. It all depends upon the unit of comparison. We are certainly not so mad as to argue that things now wear a more favourable appearance than they did a generation ago. No indeed, we freely grant and sadly acknowledge that during the past fifty years there has been a most decided and terrible deterioration, both spiritually and morally, and that not locally or provincially, but universally. The law winks at many things today which had been punished before the War. The press smiles upon things now which it had not dared to do then. The rank and file of the public

countenance today was formerly condemned by all decent people. Professing Christians are no longer shocked by sights which once horrified them.

But what does the degeneracy and wickedness of our generation prove? That the end of the age is certainly upon us? By no means. That evil is more rampant today than it has ever been before? Certainly not: the testimony of history proves otherwise. Conditions *are* far worse than they were fifty years ago, yet, in many respects, they are not nearly so bad as they were two hundred years ago. Things generally were in an awful state during the first half of the eighteenth century, but even *they* were better than much which obtained before the Reformation, during the Dark Ages. All of this simply serves to illustrate what we said in our first article: there is *an ebb and flow of the tide*—manifest throughout the history of Israel in Old Testament times; equally evident during the course of this Christian era. What is coming next? We know not. No man knows. Only fools will prophesy. Whether God will soon graciously grant a widespread revival or whether He will let loose the bolts of His judgment, remains to be seen.

This very imperfect review of Conditions in the Past would lack anything approaching completeness if we failed to notice some of the *physical judgments* which, from time to time, God has sent upon men's wickedness. Our special object in here referring to these is to protest against our "Signs-of-the-Times" men, who magnify out of all proportion and historical perspective such phenomena when they occur in our own days. If some terrible calamity happens, bringing with it great loss of life and destruction of property, and especially if such calamities quickly follow one another (for they rarely come singly) scaremongers and lovers of the sensational declare that nothing like it has ever happened before, and that such things "prove" the coming of the Lord is at our very doors. But "There is *no* new thing under the sun." These very calamities have occurred all through human history.

"We have been visited with famines, earthquakes, pestilence, inundations, thunder and lightnings in winter, and most strange

and unseasonable weather; but alas, all these have taken no effect: where is the humiliation, repentance, and reformation which they have wrought? therefore it must needs be there remains behind a great judgment” (William Perkins, 1587, Volume 3, page 424).

The earthquakes which have happened in our own lifetime, at San Francisco and Quetta, severe as they were, were mild in comparison with those which occurred at earlier dates. In the opening century of this Christian era the entire cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii were totally destroyed. In more recent times, that at Lisbon, in 1755, to mention no others, resulted in no fewer than fifty thousand people losing their lives. Thomas Brooks (Volume 6. page 191) makes reference to a famine in England in 1316 which was so terrible, “that horses, dogs, yea, men and children, were stolen for food; and the thieves newly brought into the jails were torn in pieces and eaten at once, half alive, by such as had been there longer.”

Fletcher, the Historian of Salton, tells us that in 1690 conditions were such that, “besides many wretchedly provided for, there were two hundred thousand people, or one fourth or fifth of the total population of Scotland begging from door to door.” As recently as 1847 there occurred a most fearful famine in Ireland. “One correspondent from the County of Cork to whom we sent aid, mentions that in his district forty or fifty people die daily, either of famine or of disease produced by famine. The graveyards are full; through the number of the dead and the general distress, coffins cannot be procured” (Gospel Standard, 1847, page 122). Probably some of our own readers can recall the fearful poverty and suffering in Lancashire in 1867-8, following the closing of all the cotton mills—owing to the Civil War in the U.S.A., when cotton ceased to be shipped from there.

“On one night in the month of August, 1846, a fatal blast traversed the length and breadth of Ireland, the effect of which was that the growing potatoes which, to use the language of an eye-witness, the day before stood up like gooseberry trees, next morning drooped and flagged, and in a few days filled the air with the stench of putrefaction. Men of science bring their microscopes, and talk very learnedly of fungus, and worn-out stock, and

improper soil, and over-much moisture; but the leaf blotched in a single night tells its own tale, and proclaims the *air* as the bringer of the corrupting taint. The vial of wrath thus poured into the air, swept off in a single night the food of a nation, and in spite of the noble assistance, publicly and privately, of maligned and ill-requited England, herself suffering under a similar infliction, sent at least a million Irishmen to the grave, either by positive famine or by its invariable and more fatal accompaniments, fever” (Gospel Standard, 1854, page 227).

“When the plague was in London, in 1665, when the Lord, to correct and punish the inhabitants of this kingdom for their national impieties, sent amongst them the most dreadful plague that had been in the memory of man, it was preceded by an unusual drought. The meadows were parched and the highways burnt up: insomuch that there was no food for the cattle, which occasioned, first a murrain among *them*, and then a general contagion among the *human* species, which increased in the city and suburbs of London, till eight or ten thousand died in a week. The richest inhabitants fled to the remotest countries; but the calamities of those who stayed behind, and of the poorer sort, are not to be expressed. Trade was at a full stand; all the commerce between London and the country entirely cut off, lest the infection should be propagated thereby. Nay, the country housekeepers and farmers dared not entertain their city friends and neighbours or relations who came from London, till they had performed quarantine in the fields or outhouses. If a stranger passed through the neighbourhood, they fled from him as an enemy. In London the shops and houses were quite shut up, and many of them marked with a red cross, and an inscription over the doors, ‘Lord, have mercy on us!’ Grass grew in the streets, and every night the bellman went his round with a cart, crying, ‘Bring out your dead’” (S. E. Pierce’s Letters, Volume 1, page 80). This dreadful plague was followed by a four day’s fire in London (1666) so devastating that it destroyed 89 churches and 13,200 houses.

When the Revolution occurred in Russia twenty years ago, [1917] and also in the early days of the present conflict in Spain, sensationalists announced in the most extravagant terms that

nothing like it had ever happened before. But those with the merest smattering of history would know that the Reign of Terror in France when the streets of Paris literally ran with blood at the close of the eighteenth century, witnessed that which was equally atrocious and on a far vaster scale. In his Annual-Fast sermon, Nathaniel Emmons said, "From January 1789 to October 1795 the number of slain and banished in France amounted to 2,152, 979." He added, "Since that period there have been five years of internal revolution and foreign wars, carried on with infinite waste and havoc in Holland, along the Rhine, in Switzerland, in the Pyrenean frontiers of Spain, in every part of Italy, in England, in Syria." Well did he conclude, "Human nature has been the same in all nations and in all ages."

Nor were sensationalists in those days slow to avail themselves of such material, and "students of prophecy" turned prophets themselves, announcing that such Divine judgments were the immediate precursors of the return of Christ. The same occurred again in 1848 during the Chartist riots in England—"Who does not remember that memorable day, April 10, 1848, when London, commercial, political, and aristocratical, trembled to its very centre at the Chartist procession: when the Bank of England was armed and garrisoned like a fortress, and the greatest general of the age had made his military plans by disposing artillery and soldiers at various points, to drown the threatened insurrection in torrents of human blood" (Gospel Standard, 1854, page 185). More so, sensationalists were in their heyday during the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, and the Civil War in the U.S.A., as anyone can verify for himself, if he has access to books on "The Second Coming of Christ" written at that time.

Date Fixing

We have decided to write, or rather compile, this article, as an appendage to the recent ones on *Conditions in the Past*, that our readers may be furnished with a sample of the thoughts and opinions of men in previous generations respecting the coming of our Lord and the end of the age. Not only hysterical sensationalists, but some of the most sober minded and spiritual

servants of God have attempted to draw conclusions and forecast the future from the “signs of the times” which appeared in *their* sky. The state of the world in their day, the corruption and apostasy of Christendom, and the calamitous judgments sent by God on an evil and adulterous generation, convinced them that such things were most certainly the immediate prelude to the appearing of Christ in Person. Others averred that Divine Prophecy intimated the very year in which the Papacy would be overthrown or the Day of Judgment would occur.

“Towards the close of the tenth and at the beginning of the eleventh centuries the passion for pilgrimages was greatly increased by an opinion which prevailed all over Europe—that the thousand years mentioned by John in Revelation 20:2-4 were nearly accomplished, and the end of the world at hand. A general consternation seized the minds of men. Numbers relinquished their possessions, deserted their families and friends, and hastened to the Holy Land, where they imagined Christ would suddenly appear to judge the living and the dead” (From “A History of the Church” by Charles Goodrich, 1835, page 104). Perhaps some of our readers are inclined to smile at the credulity of those who lived a thousand years ago, but we can assure them that human nature is still the same. The writer is personally acquainted with a lawyer of considerable repute, who thirty years ago was so convinced by “the signs of the times” that the coming of Christ was at the very doors, that he abandoned all thoughts of provision for old age and gave away his fortune to the promotion of missionary work. Recently, when past three score and ten, he has been obliged to take up again the practice of law to provide for his daily needs. Nor is this by any means an isolated case.

In his work on the Thessalonian Epistles, John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, (1583 A.D.), in his comments on 1 Thessalonians 5:1 said, “What may we think then, of them that write books and almanacs, and say such a year and at such a time Christ shall come; and with their fine speeches tray [frighten] and mock the world? These two hundred years past, there have ever been some which have adventured to tell such news. They have appointed many such years, and days; only to give witness to their

folly” (page 123). William Perkins informs us (Volume 3, page 473), “A Jew prophesied that in the year 1364 Messiah should come and deliver his own nation,” and that a celebrated astrologer, by the name of Albumazar, “prophesied that in the year of our Lord 1460 an end should be made of the Christian religion.” In his piece on “The End of the World” (which the printer in 1604 says “was written many years ago”) Perkins represents one saying, “All the signs of the coming of Christ are fulfilled: O what terrible earthquakes have there been! what famine! what wars and revolutions among men! what signs in the sun and moon! what flashing in the air! what blasting stars! Surely, surely the world cannot last long” (Volume 3, page 470).

In the same piece Perkins went on to quote the following, as something which deeply stirred many in his early days:

***“When after Christ’s birth there be expired,
of hundreds fifteen, years eighty and eight,
Then comes the time of dangers to be feared,
and all mankind with terrors it shall freight:
For if the world in that year do not fall,
if sea and land then perish nor decay:
Yet empires all, and kingdoms alter shall,
and man to ease himself shall have no way.”***

Again we say, such silly doggerel may now raise a smile (but for many years thousands were terrified by it), yet we well recall that in our early boyhood many in this country were rendered uneasy by the prophecies of “Mother Shipston,” two of which were: “Carriages without horses shall go, and accidents fill the world with woe,” and “The world to an end shall come, in eighteen hundred and ninety one.”

“If any age had cause to think Christ would come, certainly we have. It was not far off in the Apostles’ days—they were called ‘the last days;’ but ours are the very dregs of time. When we see an old man weak and feeble, aches and diseases of the present life increasing upon him, we say, Certainly he cannot live long: so if we look upon the temper of the world, surely it cannot endure long; Christ will come to set all things at rights” (Thomas Manton,

Volume 16, page 215). Yet almost three hundred years have passed since that able expositor drew his conclusion: and for all we know another three *thousand* years may yet run their course before human history expires.

After referring to a number of different ones who had prophesied the exact year in which Popery was to be totally destroyed, Thomas Goodwin went on to say, "I find also Mr. Mede in his *Clavis*, to pitch upon 1656, though tacitly and implicitly, yet clearly enough, as the time he is most inclined unto for the expiration of Antichrist's kingdom. For in his 'Synchronisms,' he makes the first trumpet and the Pope's 1260 days to begin together; and in his 'comment' he makes the beginning of the first trumpet to be in the year 395. So that if the reign of Antichrist begins at the year 395 A.D., then his 1260 days or years will end in 1655. And thus there will be so many years from Christ unto the beginning of the new world, as there was from the beginning of the world until the days of Noah, unto which Christ compares His coming, even 1656 years" (Volume 3, page 196).

In 1655 the Church of France thus addressed itself to brethren abroad: "Inasmuch as by these overturnings of the world, 'tis visible that its last end *cannot be far off*, and that our long-looked and long-hoped for redemption, and the coming of the eternal kingdom of the Son of God draweth nigh" (J. G. Lorimer, "Protestant Church of France," 1842, page 199). In a letter to General Fleetwood, Oliver Cromwell said (August 22, 1653): "If the Day of the Lord be so near, as some say, how should our moderation appear!" (from J. H. D'Aubigne's "Vindication of the Protector," page 159).

Well did John Owen (Volume 17, page 552) warn people of his day, "But in the meantime what things may come, I know not. Those who pretend to a clearer inspection into future things may not do amiss to strictly examine the grounds whereon they proceed. For many have been ashamed of their predictions, that within such or such a time the yoke of Babylon (Rome) should be broken." The only difference in our day is that modern prophets (?) are devoid of shame, for when the flight of time refutes their

fancies, instead of acknowledging they were wrong, they manipulate their premises and draw new conclusions, always fixing their dates just a few years in the future, thus keeping their dupes continually on the tiptoe of expectation.

“But this same revelation informs us that it shall not always be so: the time is coming, and *is now just at hand*, when God will destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations, by causing the Gospel to be preached to them all, in giving them a heart to discern and understand the truth. Then ‘the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.’ And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear, shall hearken. The heart also of the rash or foolish shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly, and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (S. Hopkins, 1772, a contemporary and intimate friend of Jonathan Edwards in New England, Volume 1, page 56).

“There are certain very memorable events, the dates of which are peremptorily fixed: as the treading of the Holy City forty-two months, the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth and under discouragements a thousand two hundred and three-score days; during which term of days also the Church is to be nourished in the wilderness even for a time, and times, and half a time; and power is given to the beast, or Antichrist, to continue forty and two months (Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). All which began, and will end together; for these dates are exactly the same; and could we be certain when these dates begin, we should have no difficulty about the expiration of them, or how long it is to be. Good men have been mistaken in their calculations for want of this: however, though we can come at no certainty as to the precise time these things shall be, yet some degree of understanding of these times may be come at; and from the circumstances of things it may be concluded that these dates cannot reach beyond an hundred and fifty years more, and it may be they may expire much sooner” (John Gill’s sermon on Isa. 21:11, 12, preached

December, 1750).

“Why cannot you pray along with the faithful for Christ’s *speedy* coming? Surely you do not doubt of the fact that He will come to judge the world is as certain as that He did come at the first time to judge the Jewish nation: ‘For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.’ The matter of fact upon Scriptural principles is undeniably clear and certain. Why then are you not so prepared for it as to make it the subject of your prayers? Is it because you put it at a great distance, and therefore think yourselves safe? Consider attentively what the Scripture says upon this point. Our Lord has given us several marks or *signs* of His coming, by which we might know *as certainly* when it was at hand, as we could know when the fig-tree puts forth her green figs that summer is nigh. There were to be wars and rumours of wars, pestilences, earthquakes in divers places, very little true faith left upon the earth, and yet as great security among careless sinners as there was in the days of Noah, when the flood came and swept them all away.

“Do you think these cannot be the forerunners of our Lord’s *speedy coming* because there always have been such things in the world? But when all these signs are at once upon the earth, and in a manner they never were before, then they become loud calls to an immediate preparation. Were there ever greater wars, or more rumours of war? Has not an uncommon pestilence raged among the cattle for several years, in this and in other countries? Were there ever such earthquakes, so universal, and of so long continuance, as have been for some years past? And does not the present state of the world as to religion greatly resemble our Lord’s description of the men upon whom that day shall come unawares as a thief in the night? And when could the account which St. Paul gives us in several of his Epistles, of the men of the latter times be more true, than it is at present? Have they not the name and form of Christianity without the power of it? Are they not worldly minded, sunk into carnal security, and so entirely influenced by the love of pleasure, that the love of God and of the things of God is not only waxed cold, but quite frozen up?

“Was there ever any age wherein our Lord’s words could be

more strictly fulfilled, ‘When the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?’ By these signs our Lord is alarming a sinful world with notices of His *speedy* coming, and if sinners are not at all alarmed, but continue still secure in their sins, this is a Scripture proof that He will *soon* come as a thief in the night and surprise them: for when they shall say Peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall come upon them, and they shall not escape” (William Romaine, Discourses on Solomon’s Song, 1771, page 368 to 370). Note well, dear reader, that this most godly man spoke repeatedly of the “speedy coming of Christ” a hundred and fifty years ago!

At the end of his “Notes on the New Testament” (about 1780) John Wesley fixed the following dates for the fulfilment of prophecies in the Revelation: “1614: an everlasting Gospel promulgated (14:6). 1810: the end of the forty-two months of the Beast; after which and the pouring out of the vials, he is not, and Babylon reigns queen (15 and 16). 1832: the Beast ascends from the bottomless pit (17 and 18). 1836: the end of the non chronos, and of the many kings; the fulfilling of the Word and of the mystery of God; the repentance of the survivors in this great city; the end of the ‘little time’ and of the three times and a half; the destruction of the Beast; the imprisonment of Satan (19 and 20).”

There seems no need for us to make citations from those who have lived nearer our own times and give quotations from such men as Edward Irving, Richard Baxter, Gratton Guinness and others, who set dates for the destruction of the Papacy, the end of the age, and the appearing of Christ. We could quote from the early writings of the Plymouth Brethren and show that eighty and ninety years ago they were just as convinced that Christ would return in their *own* lifetimes, as many of their followers are today. Nor will we burden the reader by exposing the date-fixing fallacies of the “Seventh Day Adventists,” Russellites, and Christadelphians. Sufficient has been advanced to indicate that throughout the centuries one and another has arisen posing as prophets by forecasting coming events, only for the passage of time to make evident their folly, and to exemplify the fact that “thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1).

And what is the moral to be drawn from all of this? What is the practical lesson—for it is a *practical end* we have had in view, and not the amusing of the curious or the entertaining of those who have an idle hour to pass away. Surely it is this, “For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12): yes, wise in his own conceits, wise above that which God has revealed, wise in the esteem of his fellows. He would pose before others as possessing a spiritual light and discernment which lifts him above the rank and file; he pretends unto light received from the Word which is denied those who walk not so closely with God as *he* does. The Spirit has shown *him* “things to come,” only for the passing of time to demonstrate it was some other spirit than the Spirit of God.

When the disciples asked Christ, “Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6), He did not say whether He would or would not, neither did He tell them that they entertained an erroneous conception of “the kingdom.” No, He struck more deeply, and made answer which applies to *all* His followers till the end of time: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power” (verse 7). That is definite and it is final. Shun, then, my reader, those who controvert the Son of God by seeking to persuade that you *may*, “know the times and the seasons,” that if you will accept their interpretations (?) of Prophecy you will be granted a spiritual insight into those things of which the world is ignorant. “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 3:8): it is ever drawing nearer, but for any man to affirm that the coming of the Lord is *now* at the very doors, is to affirm what Scripture nowhere warrants, and is a piece of bombastic impertinence.

Our pressing duty is to set bounds to an unholy curiosity, and rest content with the blessed fact that the future is entirely in the hands of the Most High. It is the present which limits the boundaries of our responsibility. God is working all things after the counsel of His own will, so that there is no cause for alarm or fear. Not only cannot the forces of evil go one inch farther than what has been Divinely ordained, but, even now, God is making them to subserve His own wise and holy purpose. Nothing we do,

or fail to do, will either hasten or retard by a single hour the consummation of God's counsels. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28) provides a sure resting-place for the renewed heart.

Speculations about future history are not only futile, but impious. An itching mind that craves information about coming events is a hindrance and not a help to present godliness. Leave the future with God, and seek grace to discharge your *present* duty. Part of our present duty, as well as our precious privilege, is to be "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13), but that is a vastly different thing from occupying our minds with the *evil* that is at work in the world. To be "looking for that blessed Hope" is entirely an attitude of *the heart*—the soul being engaged with the person of Christ Himself, anticipating that glad moment when He will perfectly conform us to His image. But as to *when* He will appear, the angels in Heaven know not, much less can we on earth ascertain it. To be *prepared for* His coming is the great thing, and not to be curiously prying into the how and when of it.

