

What Next In Bible Prophecy

And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light."
Lowell

4. Signs in the Heavens

SWIFTLY the Savior's prophetic glance swept through is the centuries, from the fall of Jerusalem to the times preceding His Second Coming.

He saw the great tribulation of His followers in the long period of papal supremacy foretold in Daniel's prophecy. "Who so reads, let him understand", He had said of Daniel's prophecy regarding the coming of the Romans to destroy Jerusalem. The same prophecies of Daniel had foretold the 1260 years of papal supremacy-reaching from 538 AD, the time of full exaltation of the Papacy to supremacy by the sword of empire, to 1798, when revolutionary France dealt the Papacy a deadly wound by the sword. During this long period this persecuting power would "wear out the saints of the Most High." Daniel 7:25.

The 1260 Years of Persecution

Christ's view took in this experience through which His church was to pass. It was not the tribulation accompanying the fall of Jerusalem to which He now refers here. There the tribulation fell upon those revolting against God. The time of which He now speaks is a time of trial to His own elect, a long period of persecution of His church: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days shall be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:21, 22.

Then, immediately after, He begins to talk of the signs of His second appearing. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days," the signs of His Second Coming were to begin. The appointed period of tribulation was to reach to the "time of the end," as we see in verse thirty-five of the prophecy of Daniel eleven. Christ's prophecy follows the time schedule of Daniel. Had the persecutions continued the full time, we should find the apostasy wearing out the saints, down even to the days of 1798.

The Days Shortened

But Christ foretold that those days of tribulation would be shortened; otherwise none of the saints would be left. The persecutions of the Roman Papacy were cut short. The Reformation of the sixteenth century set northern Europe generally free from that power. Even in countries which shut out the reform, the force of enlightened public opinion weakened the iron hand of intolerance.

The growing sentiment in France, of antagonism to religious intolerance-which led France later to break with Rome utterly, in the terrible days of the French Revolution -was ripe for expression long before the full prophetic period ended. In 1762 the torture to the death of a Protestant in Southern France brought such an outburst of protest, led by Voltaire, that the government paid the man's family an indemnity. The last Huguenot galley slaves were released from the French ship prisons in 1775. These things and others of like import, were tokens that the days of general tribulation had been "shortened."

The time was at hand, then, for the first of the predicted signs to appear. Christ's great prophecy had said: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven." Matthew 24:29.

The Darkening of the Sun

Most of the events heretofore fulfilling the divine forecasts had, naturally, taken place in the Old World, through which the tide of history flowed. But now a New World had come into being, a gathering place of peoples of all nations; and these predicted signs in the heavens appeared there, to be heralded to all the world.

On May 19, 1780, in New England and neighboring States, occurred the famous dark day. It came "immediately after the tribulation of those days." Under "Dark Day," Noah Webster's Dictionary said: "So called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England. Birds sang their evening songs, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; candles were lighted in the houses. The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known." - Edition of 1869.

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A professor of Harvard University, Samuel Williams, professor of mathematics and philosophy, who observed it, wrote an elaborate account for the "Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences." A few words only will be sufficient; for none of the scientists of the day could tell any more about the cause than any other observer. He said:

"The time of this extraordinary darkness was May 19, 1780. It came on between the hours of ten and eleven A.M., and continued until the middle of the next night. The extent of this darkness was very remarkable.

It seems to have extended all over the New England States. To the southward it was observed all along the seacoasts, and to the north as far as our settlements extend. It is probable it extended much beyond these limits in some directions, but the exact boundaries cannot be ascertained by any observations that I have been able to collect.

"With regard to its duration, it continued in this place at least fourteen hours; but it is probable this was not exactly the same in different parts of the country. "The appearance and effects were such as tended to make the prospect extremely dull and gloomy. Candles were lighted up in the houses. The birds, having sung their evening songs, disappeared, and became silent; the fowls retired to roost. The cocks were crowing all around, as at break of day; objects could not be distinguished but at a very little distance; and everything bore the appearance and gloom of night." - Volume I, Pages 234, 235. Boston, 1785.

A State Legislature Debates It

In the Connecticut State Legislature, which was in session that day, one member moved to adjourn when darkness fell. Then the opinion of Colonel Abraham Davenport was asked, whereupon he rose and said:

"I am against an adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may brought." – "Connecticut Historical Collection," Barber, 403.

Tins is the scene that Whittier painted with a poet's pen:

"It was on a May day of the far old year
Seventeen hundred eighty, that there fell
Over the bloom and sweet life of the spring,
Over the fresh earth and the heaven of noon,
A horror of great darkness. . . .

"Meanwhile in the old Statehouse, dim as ghosts,
Sat the lawgivers of Connecticut,
Trembling beneath their legislative robes.
'It is the Lord's great day! Let us adjourn,'
Some said; and then, as if with one accord,
All eyes were turned to Abraham Davenport.

"He rose, slow cleaving with his steady voice
The intolerable hush. 'This well may be
The day of judgment which the world awaits;
But be it so or not, I only know
My present duty, and my Lord's command
To occupy till He come. So at the post
Where He bath set me in His providence,
I choose, for one, to meet Him face to face,

No faithless servant frightened from my task,
But ready when the Lord of the harvest calls;
And therefore, with all reverence,
I would say, Let God do His work,
we will see to ours. Bring in the candles."

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Let men explain it as they may, the fact remains that the first of the signs in the heavens was hung out in that year, 1880.

“The Moon Shall Not Give Her Light”

Dr. Samuel Tenney, of New Hampshire, bore his testimony to the facts, in a letter dated December, 1785: “The darkness of the following evening was probably as gross as ever has been observed since the Almighty fiat gave birth to light. It wanted only palpability to render it as extraordinary as that which overspread the land of Egypt in the days of Moses. And as darkness is not substantial, but a mere privation, the palpability ascribed to that by the sacred historian must have arisen from some peculiar affection of the atmosphere, perhaps an exceeding thick vapor, that accompanied it. I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable shades, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eyes was equally invisible with the blackest velvet.” – “Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society,” Volume I, 1792.

“The Stars Shall Fall From Heaven”

Before this sign appeared there had come a great awakening in the study of prophecy. The events attending the close of the years of papal supremacy, amidst the scenes of the French Revolution and the upheavals growing out of it, had given Bible students to understand that prophecy was fulfilling and that Christ’s Second Coming was drawing near. Bible students were searching the prophetic scriptures, and now came the sign of the falling stars.

To this day, astronomical writers generally agree with C. G. Dolmudge, of the British Astronomical Association, in his statement concerning the falling stars: “Surpassing all displays of the kind ever seen, was that of November 12, 1833, when the meteors fell thick as snowflakes.” – “Astronomy of Today,” p. 270 (London).

The falling of the stars was seen from Canada to Mexico. Professor Olmstead, of Yale University, wrote in the American Journal of Science and Arts: “The morning of November 13, 1833, was rendered memorable by an exhibition of the phenomenon called shooting stars, which was probably more extensive and magnificent than any similar one hitherto recorded. Probably no celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with so much admiration and delight by one class of spectators, or with so much astonishment and fear by another class. For some time after the occurrence, the ‘meteoric phenomenon’ was the principal topic of conversation in every circle.”-Vol. 25 (1834), pages 363, 364.

As Foretold in the Revelation

In the book of Revelation, where these signs are also spoken of, the falling of the stars is described more minutely: “The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.” Revelation 6:12, 13.

A correspondent of the New York Journal of Commerce had this prophet’s figure of the fig tree in mind when he described the event:

“And how did they fall? Neither myself nor one of the family heard any report, and were I to hunt through nature for a simile, I could not find one so apt to illustrate the appearance of the heavens as that which St. John uses in the prophecy, before quoted. ‘It rained fire!’ says one. Another, ‘It was like a shower of fire.’ Another, ‘It was like the large flakes of falling snow before a coming storm, or large drops of rain before a shower.’

“I admit the fitness of these for common accuracy; but they come far short of the accuracy of the figure used by the prophet. ‘The stars of heaven fell unto the earth;’ they were not sheets, or flakes, or drops of fire. But they were what the world understands by the name of ‘falling stars;’ and one speaking to his fellow in the midst of the scene would say, ‘See how the stars fall;’ and he who heard, would not pause to correct the astronomy of the speaker, any more that we would reply, ‘The sun does not move,’ to one who should tell him, ‘The sun is rising.’

The stars fell ‘even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.’ Here is the exactness of the prophet. The falling stars did not come as if from several trees shaken, but from one. Those which appeared in the east fell toward the east. Those which appeared in the north fell

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toward the north; those which appeared in the west fell toward the west; and those which appeared in the south (for I went out of my residence into the park) fell toward the south. And they fell, not as the ripe fruit falls; far from it. But they flew, they were cast, like the unripe fig, which at first refuses to leave the branch; and when it does break its hold, flies swiftly, straight off, descending; and in the multitude falling, some cross the track of others, as they are thrown with more or less force.

Such was the appearance of the above phenomenon to the inmates of my house. I walked into the park with two gentlemen of Pearl Street, feeling and confessing that this scene had never been figured to our minds by any book or mortal, save only by the prophet. “-Saturday morning, November 16, 1833.

In those times many students of prophecy began to see that of a truth, the signs in the heavens foretold by Christ, and beginning exactly at the time predicted, had come to pass. These things gave added impetus to the study of prophecy and to the proclamation of the message of the Second Advent.

The Astronomer’s Predictions Failed

True, it was said that displays of falling meteors had taken place before. But none such as this. In 1866 there was an unusual display in Europe which extended as far as Syria-though it was not to be compared with that of 1833. Men began to predict that these Leonids as they were called because they seemed to come from the constellation Leo-would repeat their display every thirty-three years. Thus in 1888 Professor S. P. Langley, of Washington, in his “New Astronomy,” promised: “The great November shower, which is coming once more in this century, and which every reader may hope to see toward 1899, is of particular interest to us as the first whose movements were subject to analysis.” - Page 196.

The popular Chambers’ “Astronomy,” of England (published in 1889), said: “The meteors of November 13 may be expected to reappear with great brilliancy in 1899.” - Volume I, Page 635.

But all these predictions failed, as have the many similar forecasts uttered now and then ever since. As the English writer, Agnes M. Clerke, says in “History of Astronomy in the Nineteenth Century:” “We can no longer count upon the Leonids. Their glory, for scenic purposes, is departed.” - Page 338. London, 1902.

Men cannot foretell these things. But on the Mount of Olives, nearly two thousand years ago, Christ’s prophetic vision scanned the time from the fall of Jerusalem to His return in power and glory. He saw the ending of the days of papal persecution. And just there, He said, signs would be hung out in the heavens to let watchers know that the blessed day was approaching: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.”

The centuries passed, the days of tribulation ended, an era of greater liberty and enlightenment began to dawn; and just there, one following another. Immediately after the tribulation of those days” -the signs in the heavens began to signal their message to men. Those who “see” these things-seeing them as the signs that they are-are to lift up their heads with joy, knowing that the time of redemption “draws nigh.”

“O watchman on the mountain height,
Proclaim the coming day;
Behold the spires of golden fires
Mount upward on the way.

“Coming, yes, He’s coming,
Let all the ransomed sing;
The hills are bright with holy light,
All hail the coming King!”

5. Signs in the Earth

NOT only were the signs of Christ’s Second Advent to appear in the heavens, but events on earth were to proclaim the near approach of the great day.

Things to Come on Earth

In His prophetic forecast of signs-both of the fall of Jerusalem and of His Second Coming in

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glory-Christ enumerated events and conditions on earth. Some of these things are marked on a small scale in the history of times preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. But on a far larger scale-a world scale-these things appear in our own day, as tokens following the signs in the heavens. Christ enumerated some of them as follows:

1. "Wars and rumors of wars."
2. "There shall be famines."
3. "And pestilence."
4. "Iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."
5. A world missions movement: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14.

"Wars and Rumors of Wars"

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Verse 7. But, one may say at once, "the world has always had wars. How then can wars be a sign of the approaching advent?"

But evidently in the last days war was to increase to such destructive force that men might recognize it as one of the signs foretold by Christ. It will not do to ignore the sign, saying, These things have always been. Prophecy forewarns that that is what many will say: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." 2 Peter 3:3, 4, 10.

That is the word of the Lord to men who see the conditions foretold, and who yet hear on every side the soothing cry that things have always been so. This very cry is a sign. It was to be heard all abroad in the last days, and so indeed we hear it today.

Things Not "as They Were"

The fact is that all things do not "continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." In this matter of war, we have seen things never seen on earth before. With the World War of 1914-18, this old world turned a new corner in the history of man. Things have never been the same since. Breaking upon the nations like Jeremiah's -whirlwind from the coasts of the earth," came-

"The rumbling storm of great events, of nations sore distressed."

There was never anything like it. Winston Churchill, British statesman, wrote a book "World Crisis," an intimate view of the World War. He says: "The Great War through which we have passed differed from all ancient wars in the immense power of the combatants and their fearful agencies of destruction, and from all modern wars in the utter ruthlessness with which it was fought. All the horrors of all the ages were brought together, and not only armies but Whole populations were thrust into the midst of them." - Volume I, Page 10.

Professor C. J. H. Hayes, of Columbia University (New York), says of the colossal proportions of that war:

"Only nineteen independent states on the earth's surface preserved neutrality, and these were relatively small and unimportant. The Allies put nearly 40,000,000 men under arms and the Central Powers nearly 20,000,000-a total of almost 60,000,000! Of this huge number, at least 10,000,000 were killed and approximately 20,000,000 maimed for life. And these figures do not include civilians who perished from famine, disease, and massacre. For four years blood flowed like water and material wealth was poured out similarly." - Current History, December, 1924.

One volume, "Why Wars Must Cease," compiled by a women's peace organization, says: "The Great War, which lasted only four years, was greater than the Thirty Years' War, greater than the Hundred Years' War, greater than the Napoleonic Wars, greater than all the wars of history put together, in its economic implications."

As everything in those days slipped over the brink into the seething caldron, Kipling's nervous pen wrote,

"Our world has passed away
In wanton overthrow;

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There's nothing left today
But steel and fire and woe!"

How Could It Be?

How could such a thing fall suddenly upon the nations in a time of high civilization, with peace conferences, and treaties, and talk of no more war forever? In all Christendom there was talk of beating swords into plowshares.

But Scripture forewarns that the cry of peace and safety, so often raised in religious circles, will be a prelude to wars to the very end-when the final clash of Armageddon will come. The apostle Paul foretells it in his description of the coming of the last crisis:

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4.

It was the sudden unexpectedness of the crisis of 1914 that staggered the imagination of men. In January, 1914, a British statesman had said that he thought the time was "the most favorable during the last twenty years" for reducing the navy.

On August 1, the day after commitments that meant a general European war, the London Daily Telegraph commented on the "extraordinary rapidity" of the developments in a crisis "absolutely unparalleled- in this generation, "perhaps in the history of the world:"

"It is this alarming violence, this remorseless haste, as of a tornado that takes away our breath and paralyzes our thoughts. Human imagination is stunned by so sudden, so tremendous, and so unexpected a catastrophe."

Many Hearts Thought of It as a Sign

Upon many a mind was thrust thought of the descriptions of the last days in Scripture prophecy. Leslie's Illustrated Weekly (New York), not given to Scriptural exposition, said:

"Is it surprising that some are inquiring if the end of all things is not approaching? The world may well be sobered by the thought." March 1, 1917.

The missionary organ of the Church of England said: "Many see in the events preceding and accompanying this terrible cataclysm of war the signs of our Lord's near return." - Church Missionary Review, November, 1914 (London).

President Wilson, of the United States, in his war message to Congress, on December 4, 1917, said: "A supreme moment of history has come. The hand of God is laid upon the nations."

The world recognized it as more than a clash of human weaknesses and national rancor. It was a sharp turn into a new era of international conditions, a sign that the stormy times foretold by Christ of the latter days had begun in earnest.

A New Day in Military Science

The nineteenth century invented many things of military technique; but it has been left to our twentieth century to crown all the ages in preparations for destruction of human life.

Professor Schuman, in a book, "International Politics," says of the mechanization of war. "In the twentieth century the cod of the machine has placed in the hands of the god of war an inexhaustible array of weapons capable of spreading death and ruin on a scale so vast as to make the bloodiest devastation of Attila, Genghis Khan, or Tamerlane pale into insignificance." - Page 647.

These inventions were tried out on the bodies of men in the great struggle that turned the world into the steep downward road.

"The Maxims cracked like cattle whips above the struggling hordes.
They rolled and plunged and writhed like snakes
In the trampled wheat and the blackthorn brakes,
And the lightning leaped among them
Like clashing crimson swords."
Alfred Noyes

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But then the new forces were but in their infancy. Mr. Lloyd George, war-time Premier of Britain, said a year after that war: "What would happen if you had another war baffles imagination. Discoveries made almost at the end of the war, if they had been used, would have produced horrors indescribable-discoveries by ourselves, discoveries by the French, discoveries by the Germans. Another year or two of war would have produced consequences which have only been described in works of fiction like the remarkable works of Mr. H. G. Wells. And if, after years of devising and inventing, we still have another war with new terrors that no man ever thought of at the beginning, because there were terrors at the end of this war that no one dreamed of at the beginning of the war. If we are going to have a repetition of that, civilization might as well be wrecked and this world be driven to something-not the Middle Ages or the Dark Ages, because they did not produce annihilation-but to something that the world has never conceived in its most imaginative moments." - London Times, Dec. 19, 1919.

Ten years later, a Swedish military writer, Major K. A. Bratt, in a book, "That Next War," reports that inventive genius has never ceased its labors to prepare for a war that will surpass all the vision of destruction that the human mind has ever imagined. He sees the end of civilization in it. In one chapter, "On the Road to Annihilation," he said:

"Those who consider that a new world war will be the downfall of civilization and a real Armageddon of the nations-and they are not a few-share this vision [of annihilation] and this opinion." - Page 92.

Ten years more, and men knew that, despite pacts and treaties and agreements and pledges, it would take but some untoward incident to bring every man, woman, and child into war's perils. Winston Churchill, one of the British cabinet leaders during the great struggle, says again in a war volume, "Aftermath:"

"It is established that henceforth whole populations will take part in war, all doing their utmost, all subjected to the fury of the enemy. It is established that nations who believe their life is at stake will not be restrained from using any means to secure their existence. It is probable-nay, certain-that among the means which will next time be at their disposal will be agencies and processes of destruction wholesale, unlimited, and perhaps, once launched, uncontrollable.

"Mankind has never been in this position before. Without having improved appreciably in virtue or enjoying wiser guidance it has got into its hands for the first time tools by which it can unfailingly accomplish its own extermination. That is the point in human destinies to which all the glories and toils of men have at last led them. Death stands at attention, obedient, expectant and ready if called on to pulverize, without hope of repair, what is left of civilization. He awaits only the word of command." Page 483.

No wonder our Lord, on the Mount of Olives, with prophetic vision sweeping all the future, named "wars and rumors of wars" as a sign that His Second Coming is near at hand.

A President and a Premier Speak

In a radio speech to hearers in the United States and the world, President Roosevelt, October 26, 1938, after the crisis in the Czecho-Slovakian matter was passed, called upon men to take notice:

"It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword. There can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force. There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the threat of war. You cannot organize civilization around the core of militarism and at the same time expect reason to control human destinies.

"For more than twelve years the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament. Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth.

If there is no general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared."

Months before this, the Premier of Britain, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, had cried out in distress over the continual rumors of wars. Surely he must have had in his thoughts Christ's words foretelling these conditions: "You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars." The Premier said in a speech at Kettering: "Almost every week we hear rumors of war on this question or on that in other parts of the world, and all the principal nations are spending their precious savings on devising and manufacturing the most efficient instruments for the destruction of one another. I wonder whether, since the world began, has it ever seen

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such a spectacle of human madness and folly?" - London Times, July 4, 1938.

No; never before. These things are tokens that the day of Christ's coming is drawing near. That is the only remedy for a sinful world. Only His Second Coming will make "wars to cease." Christ, in foretelling these conditions, said, "Lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh."

We may well make it the habit of life to look up. Amidst calamities and distresses coming upon the earth, we may see in these things the signs of a brighter day coming.

Plowshares Turned Into Swords

The sure word of prophecy pictures a warlike world to the end. True, we are told that "it shall come to pass in the last days, that many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and He will teach us His ways. And He shall judge among the nations: . . . and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they, learn war any more." Isaiah 2:2-4.

But this is what "many people" will be saying. The prophecy tells what the world will actually be doing it will be turning the plowshares, the products of the field, into armaments. And by so doing the world will be saying: "Proclaim you this among the Gentiles [the nations]: Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Let the heathen be wakened. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision ["threshing," margin]: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. But the Lord will be the hope of His people [or, as the margin puts it, "the place of repair," or "harbor"]." Joel 3:9-16.

The refuge and hope of the world is in the Second Coming of the Lord. That will bring an end to wars and distresses. Christ surely spoke this great prophecy, outlining these events, in order that we may find in Him the harbor of refuge, safe amidst the storm.

6. Signs in the Physical World

WHEN you shall see all these things," said Christ, "know that He is near, even at the doors." Matthew 24:33, margin. That is the bright side of the distressful conditions that He describes as preceding the Second Coming.

The world is sadly worn with the reign of sin. It affects the very elements. One might question that. How could sin affect this material earth? But back of sin, a destroying element, is the originator of sin. Satan is the destroyer.

The Elements Under the Curse

In the beginning, when Satan lured man into sin, a curse was brought upon the earth. It is not that God arbitrarily cursed the earth. Sin itself, in an originally perfect creation, has wrought trouble for man and brought disintegration and ruin upon the earth itself. The apostle Paul represents the earth itself as waiting for the day of restoration: "We know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now." Romans 8:22.

One thinks of the earth as unchanging, but the Lord says: "The earth shall wax old like a garment." Isaiah 51:6.

The conditions that Christ described as signs of His near coming show that truly this old world is sadly worn. And the human race is attacked by multiple forms of physical dangers. This leads us to other of the signs foretold by Christ in the great prophetic outline of Mount Olivet.

"And Pestilence." Matthew 24:7

One of the gifts of Providence to this age of increase of knowledge has been increased knowledge in medical and sanitary science. This has led to the prolonging of millions of lives. No one can be guiltless who does not study to learn how to care for health. Our bodies are not our own. "You are bought with a price." "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10: 3 1.

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Yet with all this advancement of knowledge, we must confess that pestilence can sweep the earth in our time. Dr. Hollis Godfrey, president of the Engineering-Economics Foundation of America, made public this list of deaths by calamities, covering the time of the World War and but a few years following:

War	9,000,000
Epidemics	40,000,000
Famine	5,000,000
Earthquakes	200,000
Floods	200,000
Tidal Waves	200,000
Tornadoes	200,000

The terrible harvest of pestilences or epidemics overtopped war itself. Who, looking at this, does not think of the visitation of influenza that sprang out of the closing wartime in 1918? It did not look so serious. But it accounted for a large proportion of the huge total of epidemic fatalities printed above. "This pandemic," said the postwar edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, "swept over the world in three successive waves." No one yet knows how it leaped into the remotest spots on earth, where no human carriers took it. It was said that only the islands of St. Helena and Mauritius, in the far southern seas, escaped it. Again and again in these visitations we are left to face the fact that Satan, the destroyer, is working with great power, knowing that he bath but a short time." Revelation 12:12.

As "wars and rumors of wars- constitute in our day a sign, so out of the World War, in some mysterious way, sprang world-sweeping pestilence that answer also to the sign that Christ foretold. The English author, Sir Hall Caine, wrote soon after the Great War: "The war has added to the number of the world's diseases. For reasons the human mind cannot fathom, death lies in wait for man in the earth, the water, and the air. But, as if the elements were not cruel enough, war itself creates diseases. Partly from the new conditions of warfare and partly from its churning up of the earth, full of human remains, the war of the last four years has apparently liberated innumerable diseases which are now sweeping through the world. Many of these diseases are unknown, and it will be generations, perhaps centuries, before they can be conquered. Meantime through the years of peace death will stalk in the footsteps of the war, claiming its victims by thousands and tens of thousands." - Hearst's Magazine, January, 1919.

Men know that these things have come upon the world with a new revelation of destroying power, sufficient to clearly constitute a sign of the times. The London Fortnightly Review, declaring that we were watching the "disruption of the world" that seemed so secure in prewar times, said: "Pestilence followed war, famine over vast tracts has followed pestilence. And no man or woman who has lived through these five years but knows in his or her heart that the old careless prewar world lies dead, that throughout the present world subversive forces of evil are striving for liberation." - October, 1922.

"There Shall Be Famines." Matthew 24:7

One might think serious famine could hardly come in these times of international transportation and interchange of goods. Famines there have been in all history. It was famine in Syria and Egypt that sent Jacob and his sons down to buy corn stored in Egyptian corn pits by their long-lost Joseph. But these things were to be so severe in the last days as to constitute a sign.

In the prophecy this sign is associated with "wars and rumors of wars." War conditions have contributed to famine conditions and hindered relief efforts. Famines destroyed millions in China in the days of revolution and civil war that turned the old monarchy into a republic. When America was perplexed over a huge crop surplus, it was estimated that four millions died of hunger in Northwest China. With the land torn by war and banditry, no mass movements of food could be undertaken by relief agencies.

And there was Russia. Following the Great War and the great revolution, the severest famine in the history of that country came. Only a little while before, the people had marched singing to the tune of the spirited Marseillaise of the French Revolution:

"Let us give up the ancient world, Let us shake its dust from our feet. We want no idol in gold. We will go to our suffering brethren. We will go to those who are starving. March! March! Workmen, forward!"

But within a few months famine's gaunt hand had laid hold of whole provinces in Russia. Doctor

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Nansen, of Norway, the famed Arctic explorer, headed the international relief effort in 1921-22. He wrote that the famine was “beyond all doubt the most appalling that has ever happened in the recorded history of man.”

“Millions died in the torture of hunger during the famine. Thousands upon thousands went mad from pain before the end. Cannibalism was rife throughout a population as great as that of the States of New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.”- Current History, July, 1929.

Two or Three Millions Perished

Relief efforts extended to the Armenians, a million of these being wiped out by famine. Doctor Nansen laid much of the weight of blame upon the war that had disrupted social conditions. If a “next war” is allowed to come, he declared, “it will certainly be the end of white civilization.”

Mans Needs the Creator

When the rains refused to come in Russia over whole districts, one official-an old man who had taken part in public repudiations of God, after the manner of the French Revolution-said to a missionary friend of mine who was suffering, too, with her neighbors: “I am afraid we have made a mistake. We have voted God away. But we can’t make it rain. I fear we made a mistake. We need a God who can send rain.”

A man with a Russian name-Raymond Keresensky wrote of a lesson that he had learned:

“To plow and drag the stubble field
Behind a heaving, sweating team
And then in autumn take the yield
Of yellow grain: This was my scheme of things.
I dug the sod, What need was there of God?

“A plow and reaper, things like these
Had made me great. I had no need
For prayers and solemn liturgies.
I had a million mouths to feed.
I had to turn the sod. To me there was no God.”

Then the skies failed, and out of it the poet-farmer learned that he needed the living God as Partner in his toil. In the midst of latter-day calamities many of us may learn lessons of dependence upon God. “When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” Isaiah 26:9.

But the prophet Isaiah sadly added: “Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.” Verse 10.

Yet Greater Losses

In 1933, a still more disastrous hunger year, almost unheard of in the West, came to Russia. An American engineer in Russian service, in charge of welfare work in a great tractor plant, called on an official to learn what to say to the workmen who were unsettled by news of famine in some parts. He says: “ ‘Comrade Petrovsky,’ I said, ‘the men at our factory are saying that seven or eight millions of peasants have died from the famine all over Russia.’

‘Only five million have died this year,’ Petrovsky observed casually.”-Fred E. Beal, in Baltimore News, July 13,1935.

From 1928 to 1930 the hunger death, information regarding which was not widespread in the Western World, swept northwestern China. The China Famine Relief organization reported it: “A human tragedy greater and more terrible than any the world has ever known. More than 12,000,000 people have starved to death.”- Washington News, October 5,1931.

“There shall be famines,” said Christ, viewing the last days in prophetic vision. The signs show that those days have begun.

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“Earthquakes, in Divers Places.” Matthew 24:7

The most destructive earthquakes concerning which we have accurate historical information have come in modern times—in fact, in very modern times. No more appalling manifestation of earth movements has been known than that march of great mountains over villages and valleys in Kansu, Northwest China, in 1920. “The mountains walked in the night,” said the survivors. A hundred thousand were buried.

What one authority describes as “the greatest single disaster since the flood,” came upon Yokohama and Tokyo, Japan, by the earthquake of 1923.

One journalist observer in North America, A. L. Baker, in his book, “Hope of the World,” says of modern earthquakes compared with ancient ones (based on a list given by Nelson’s Loose Leaf Encyclopedia): “This list begins with an- earthquake in China in the year 1038 AD, and comes down to the Japanese catastrophe of 1923. One significant observation to be made from this list is the fact that during the fifty years beginning with 1875 there were more severe earthquakes than in the 850 years preceding. ... Our age is preeminent in the number and severity of earthquakes. No other epoch is even a close rival in this phenomenon of nature. Without doubt Christ was looking forward to this time when He declared that great earthquakes shall be in divers places. - Pages 57, 59.

The prophecy foretold that amidst these times heart would fail “for fear.” The Associated Press, reporting an earthquake that destroyed towns in Italy, in 1930, said that the terror of the quake was “so sharp and frightful that the number of deaths from fright in Naples alone was estimated at fifty.” Yet Naples was outside the zone of destruction. The pitiful story rolls out before us from year to year until it seems truly that-

“Final Ruin fiercely drives Her plowshares o’er creation.” - Young

Volcanic Activity

Earthquakes are classed with volcanic activity. The prophet Joel may include these smoking earth furnaces in his picture of last-day signs: “Wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. For the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.” Joel 2:30, 31.

Of the eruption of the West Indian volcano, Soufriere, in 1902, an eyewitness said: “The stupendous pillar of smoke and fire fascinated one by its awful grandeur.”

“Fire, and pillars of smoke,” said the prophecy. The explosion of Krakatoa, in the strait of Sunda, Dutch East Indies, in 1883, is called, “The largest cataclysm since the deluge.” The pillar of fire and smoke and dust and vapor was estimated to be twenty miles high. One author says: “At night the canopy illuminated by the light of the volcano resembled a blood-red curtain.”- Volcanoes of North America,” J. C. Russell, p. 25.

Older people will remember the blood-red sunsets that persisted for several years following. They were supposed to have been caused by the red volcanic dust left in the atmosphere when “the air wave pulsed round the world four times to the antipodes and three times back.” - Sources of Volcanic Energy,- J. C. Salley, p. 119. This author well describes how man feels in the presence of such overwhelming energy: - “When the mysterious flaming signals are flashed into the sky from Kilauea or Stromboll, vibrations go throbbing back and forth through the rocky crust of the earth, mountains rise and cities are obliterated in a night, and towering peaks, lit up with the scarlet flames of hydrogen, pulsate with the thunder music of the elements. All these manifestations of power crowned in flame, are so terrible that they strike awe into the soul of man.” Id. p. 242.

These terrific displays bid us find refuge in God against that final sign when not earth only, but “the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” Luke 21:26, 27.

Unbelief may say, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” 2Peter3:4.

Inspiration says that some will be saying this “in the last days.” And some do say it. In repeating the very words foretold, they themselves are signs that the last times are come.

But the fact is that these things that Christ cited as signs are not things that have been since the beginning of creation. In our day have come-

The greatest war in the history of man.

The greatest fatalities by pestilence ever known.

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The greatest famines ever known.
The most destructive earthquakes of all times.
These are signs by which men may know that the Second Advent of Christ draws near.

7. Signs in the Religious and Social Worlds

THIS is one of the signs, a letting down religiously at the very time, above all times, when men are exhorted to be awake and trusting in the living God. Christ said of the times before His Second Coming: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Matthew 24:12, 13.

Again and again Scripture prophecy represents the last days as days of decay of faith. Christ asks: "Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8.

Unbelief Like a Flood

One of the signs of our times is the tide of unbelief that has swept over Christendom. Rabbi Wise, of New York, looking at Christendom as well as Jewry, says that unbelief now is not something unique and spectacular like Voltaire's rationalism in the eighteenth century, or Ingersoll's atheism in the nineteenth. Today's unbelief, he finds, is normal and well-nigh universal. He says:

"The religious indifference of today is not unique. It does not stand out. It is not the foible of a smart set of hyper educated intellectuals. It is the accepted fact rather than the pronounced heresy of the lives of millions, and these millions, be it noted, the most thoughtful and intelligent in all lands.

"For religion, as it has been presented to them, is based on belief. And they simply do not believe."-The Century Magazine, July, 1926.

"Shall He find faith on the earth" when He comes? The enemy of faith has wrought his master work in these days just before the Lord is to appear.

The New England educator, James Truslow Adams, well-known essayist and student of life and conditions, sums up the rapid progress of this spirit of unbelief in recent years. "In the 80's," he says, "there was belief in the Bible as the inspired word of God." "The older generation was taught that God gave certain commands." (As the Ten Commandments.) "It is useless," he says, "to tell that to a young person today." "We of the older generation have played with ideas and let loose forces the power of which we little dreamed of. We have, indeed, sowed the wind, and it will be those of the younger generation who will reap the whirlwind unless they can control it. They have inherited perhaps the biggest mess and biggest problem that was ever bequeathed by one generation to another. Never has the road been wilder or the signposts fewer." - Atlantic Monthly, November, 1926.

The New Paganism

We add one testimony more, from one of the class who reject the divine authority of Holy Scripture. It is from a university professor who teaches in a school that still bears the name "Wesleyan," after a man whom God used so powerfully in reviving religious life from the formality that was upon it in the days of rationalism in Europe.

This university man sees the tendency of religious people to compromise with science, so called, where it assumes to explain away the idea of a creation by the word of God. But he says that is not enough. He tells what the scientific spirit of the age demands:

"Religion claims to possess divine truth or rather a divine way to truth. It cannot give this up and remain religion. And science demands no less than the unconditional surrender of this claim to truth. -- Scientific Monthly, November, 1926.

This is the spirit permeating many educational centers where the youth are trained for their lifework. At a Baltimore convention of the Lutheran body, Dr. Paul Krauss described the cult of unbelief in these words:

"There is a general tendency toward skepticism in our secular institutions of education, a skepticism that breeds cynicism.

"The most dangerous element in our American life is not to be found in our slums, nor in our

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industrial cities, nor in the agricultural sections, nor in Washington. The most dangerous spot in American life is to be found in the field of secular education.

The greatest enemy of Christianity is the godless professor. He may be sincere in searching after the truth, but there is no wisdom apart from God.”-New York Times, Oct. 9, 1938.

It is the same cultured paganism, hopeless and helpless and dark, that the apostles met when they went out into the Roman world of the first century. Only it is in new dress. It may commend Scripture as literature of a high order; it extols Christ; but as for holding Holy Scripture as the directly inspired voice of the living God to men, that old-fashioned faith is disappearing.

When Christ asked, “When the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?” He surely had in mind the only kind of living faith there is. This is faith: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17.

We admire the spirit of research, and marvel at the facts discovered by scientists in modern times. It is a part of the providential provision by which this age has seen the fulfillment of that ancient prophecy of the “time of the end:” “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” Daniel 12:4.

But science has not the remotest qualification for discussing the ways of creative power. The laboratory may determine every element in a seed-except the life! Not all the laboratories on earth could produce one living seed of corn. God alone can do that. And when science tries to find a substitute for the creative power of God, the Creator looks down from heaven and asks: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me. Where was thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” Job 38:2-4.

The Old Book Stands

Religion to a great extent has tried to conform the Bible to the claims of modern scientific unbelief, and has ended by putting out the light of Holy Scripture. Cowper said it exactly right long ago, when this program was first beginning:

“Thus men go wrong with an ingenious skill, Bend the straight rule to their own crooked will; And with a clear and shining lamp supplied, First put it out, then take it for a guide.”

It is the inspiration of the living God that puts the everlasting light into Holy Scripture. Without faith-faith in the living God who speaks with authority from heaven in these pages-the letter of the Book is but as the word of man, void of power. Through the written words faith makes contact with eternal power. It is like the trolley on the electric car that touches the current that works all the mechanism. The touch brings the power into the works. The faith that touches the living God in His word, brings the power, actual working of divine creative power, into heart and life.

That is how the apostle Paul could write to the Thessalonians, who had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively works also in you that believe.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

That is why the evil one is making his last stand against the divine authority and integrity of Holy Scripture. It is by these words that God works in the lives of those who believe.

“He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” Psalm 33:9.

Creative power is in the words of God. It is not mere instruction that we need. We must have the new heart, a new life from above. We need the power to create in us what is not there at all. Ages ago Mencius, the Chinese sage, said truly: “Instruction can impart information, but not the power to execute.

Power to create anew is man’s need-power that will put sin out and put righteousness within; and that power comes by faith only in the living word of the living Christ who died for sinful man.

That is why Satan is working in these last days to dethrone the supreme authority of the inspired Scriptures in ‘ the minds of this generation. But the Old Book stands, as it has stood through the ages,

“A tower of strength That stood foursquare to every wind that blew.”

Perilous Times

The times have come of which the apostle wrote: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” 2 Timothy

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3:1-5.

The times are perilous to us all, because this spirit is in our natural flesh. Only the power of Christ can deliver any one of us from it; and that power is received by faith in the word of God. That is why this modern setting aside of the Holy Scriptures, making it a good inspiring book, but a humanly written book, is cutting the very nerve of true religious experience. "Having the form of godliness, but denying the power."

"Lovers of pleasures." And the rush of pleasure seeking goes on no matter what happens, even as it did when ancient Rome was falling. The early Christian writer, Orosius, quotes a Roman as saying when the Goths were at the gates: "The games of the circus were kept up, he didn't care what happened to Rome." "King Alfred's Books," G. E. Browne, p. 97.

"Disobedient to parents," "without natural affection." Thank God for the multitudes of home-trained children of today who are an honor to parents. God bless the godly parents.

"Happy the home where Jesus' name
Is sweet to every ear; Where children early lisp His fame,
And parents hold Him dear."

God bless the old-fashioned home that is truly a house of God, "where prayer is wont to be made."

But from all sides come testimonies that the decadence of the old-fashioned home training is an ominous symptom of these times. An experienced educator writes: "The disrespect and careless attitude of children toward their parents is not a recent matter; but the disregard and neglect of parents, who pursue their own pleasures with little consideration of their duties to their children, is a phenomenon of recent development. These conditions are found not only among the latest generation, the older group as well is swept along." Beatrice M. Hinkle, M.D., Harper's Magazine, December, 1925.

The signs foretold are all about, beacon signals that the day of Christ's coming is drawing near. "Therefore be you also ready," Jesus said; "for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes." Matthew 24:44.

"Therefore be you also ready," says Christ. Every day we are to know that all sins are forgiven. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.

"The wonders of redeeming love
Our highest thoughts exceed;
The Son of God came from above
For sinful man to bleed.

"And now before His Father's face
His precious blood He pleads;
For those who seek a throne of grace
His love still intercedes.

"He knows the frailties of our frame,
For He has borne our grief;
Our great High Priest once felt the same,
And He can send relief.

"His love will not be satisfied,
Till He in glory see
The faithful ones for whom He died
From sin forever free."

Cottrell

8. "Distress of Nations, With Perplexity"

NOT only were signs to appear in the heavens, but events on earth were to preach the near approach of the great day. In Luke's report of the Savior's outline of prophecy, we read of the very last signs: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars. And upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall

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they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” Luke 21:25-27.

Here are world conditions, foretold as signs-conditions that were to prevail in the earth in the last days.

“Distress of Nations”

Once most of us, perhaps, interpreted this distress as describing the loss of life and property in war. But we have lived to see the literal fulfillment of this prophecy in other than wartime. We saw it in the times of distress and perplexity that leaped down suddenly upon the world in the great depression of 1930 and onward.

No doubt it came as one of the results of the World War, out of the destruction of lives and values and the dislocation of everything in that time. But out of a clear sky depression fell upon all nations. It was something new in its nature and magnitude, a sign that stands out by itself-a “distress of nations,” exactly as described by Christ on the Mount of Olives.

At a great mass meeting in the Royal Albert Hall, London, in 1932, the former Prince of Wales made use of the very language of the prophecy in describing world conditions. He said: “We have before us a world sick with fearful doubt. A world of troubled nations. In almost every land widespread distress and perplexity.” Speech of June 27, 1932.

“Distress of nations, with perplexity,” the prophecy foretold. “Widespread distress and perplexity,- said the royal prince.

No one could explain it. Montagu Norman, governor of the Bank of England, said in a Mansion House speech to bankers. “Confused affairs of the world have brought about a series of events and a general tendency which appears to me at this time as being outside the control of any man and any government and any country.” - Quoted in Signs of the Times, Nov. 22, 1932.

Thus there suddenly dropped down upon all the world a time of “distress of nations.”

“With Perplexity”

The distress brought with it perplexity. Many a soul has been perplexed in other times. We go through personal trials, perplexed to know what course to take. We must then trust God and pray for guidance.

But this “distress,” “with perplexity,” in Christ’s prophecy, must point to some sweeping condition that comes upon men generally as a cloud. The world has been passing through just that, as the children of men never had before. Let one testimony, by Senator William E. Borah, veteran of the United States Congress, suffice to show that this sign of “perplexity” is fulfilling. In a radio address, in April, 1938, Senator Borah told his nation:

“Democracies are bleeding inwardly. The healing is not to be found in armaments, but in bringing contentment, happiness, and prosperity to the harried, confused, and discouraged citizen. There is greater danger to our democracy in that vast army of unemployed encamped in every city, town, and village throughout the land, in that 50,000,000 men, women, and children living in constant sight of the poverty line, poorly clad and poorly fed, in thousands, with the number increasing the hundreds of thousands every year, of malformed and rickety children, of millions of girls and boys who leave colleges and universities finding no avenue in which to engage their energies, their genius. More danger here by far than in any fleet of battleships which any nation, or group of nations, may choose to send against us.

“The danger coming from the latter is remote, highly problematical. But the danger as to the former is here in all its hideous ugliness eating away at the moral fiber of our people. Widespread poverty, want, and suicide walking with want, will in time break the morale and destroy the faith in government of the people.”

Men of all professions and all religions are perplexed. Statesmen struggle with conditions, perplexed, and try one thing and another to find the way of relief. Of a truth there came upon mankind a time of distress, “with perplexity.”

“Men’s Hearts Failing Them for Fear”

This scripture expresses a characteristic of the times that have followed the World War. In that war the world entered a new era of “fear.”

Note the calendar of the years since the Great War, as represented here by a few spokesmen for apprehensive mankind:

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1919. "The future fills me with dread." - David Lloyd George, wartime Premier.

"Europe is haunted by a thousand fears." - Sir Philip Gibbs, in "Day After Tomorrow."

1920. The "Rational Press Annual," publication of British Rationalism, said: "Not since the collapse of the ancient world have men's minds failed them for fear, as they are failing them in the presence of the immeasurable desolation upon which we look today."

1925. "Not since Christ was born in Bethlehem have the stars looked down upon a world more filled with anxiety and fear." - Los Angeles Examiner, January 16, 1925.

1927. "The cloud of black fear hangs over all the world." - New York Christian Herald.

1932. "The whole world seems to be quaking with fear." - Lady Oxford, in "More Memories."

1933. Mr. Baldwin, Prime Minister, in a speech at Edinburgh: "At this moment many men's hearts are failing them because of the difficulties that lie ahead." - London Times, Nov. 18, 1933.

1938. The Archbishop of Canterbury (England), at diocesan conference, July 11:

"It sometimes looks, the world over, as if it were, for the present, under the dominion of evil spirits. One of the chief of these evil spirits is the spirit of fear. I know of no words that can describe better the world situation at the present time than the familiar words: 'Men's hearts failing them for fear.'"

Is it not clear that ever since the World War, we have been living under a cloud of fear among the nations which marks this as the time to which Christ's prophecy points?

"Looking After Those Things Which Are Coming"

"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."

That is the ground of the fear that oppresses the hearts of thoughtful men. What is coming? Men of affairs tell us other wars are coming; that the "war to end war" prepared the ground for other wars. Let statesmen and writers of international repute tell it, beginning with the days just after the close of the World War:

1919. Alfred Noyes (London): "Practical men, with their feet planted solidly on the earth, are looking into the future as into an immeasurable darkness." - Saturday Evening Post, April 22, 1919.

Signor Mussolini (Italy): "It seems to me that the twentieth-century people are destined to live in a gloomy period of history, in an age clouded by tragedy."

1929. Ex-Premier Lloyd George (England): "The future fills me with dread. I am afraid of what will happen. I honestly don't believe European civilization could survive another great war."

1938. Ex-Premier Baldwin (England): "The world cannot forever continue plunging from crisis to crisis." Washington Star, Sept. 10, 1938.

Premier Neville Chamberlain (England): "When I look round the world, I must say I am appalled at the prospects." - Speech, July 2, 1938.

To Destroy the Earth

What a "next war" will mean in death-dealing weapons has long been made clear. Only a few citations will suffice:

Sir Philip Gibbs (London): "Scientists of today, the wisest of them, are filled with grave anxieties about the near future, and prophesy dark things. They are afraid of the powers they are putting into the hands of men." - "The Day After Tomorrow."

Field Marshal Sir William, Robertson: "The most important change resulting from recent inventions is that a distinction can no longer be drawn between those who fight at the front and those who stay at home and assist the fighters. All alike will be subject to attack, for the enemy's main objective will not, as in the past, be the opposing field armies, but rather the will of the opposing nation." - London Graphic, Feb. 28, 1925.

As the Czech o-Slovakian crisis passed, in October, 1938, ex-Premier Lord Baldwin said in the British House of Lords:

"Had there been war there would have been tens of thousands of mangled people-citizens, women, children before a single soldier or sailor gave his life for his country. That is an awful thought." - New York Times, Oct. 5, 1938. Dr. Edgar Fahs Smith, president of the American Chemical Society, 1921-22, remarked not a great while before, his death in 1928: "By means of the chemical discoveries of the last ten years it is possible to wipe from the face of the earth entire nations."

One more word we may allow in this roll call of agencies in preparation. Professor Edward

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Branly, member of the Institute of France, discoverer of the wireless telegraph transmitter, gave his view of the possibilities of this warfare of the future:

“Instead of slaying eight or ten millions, it will lay a hundred millions low; that is, it will annihilate part of the human race. All production and labor will disappear. Civilization will not survive. Men will return to a state of savagery.”

When the prophet Joel, writing in the days of Assyria, was given a view of the times just before the coming of ‘the great and the terrible day of the Lord,’ he saw in vision “wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.” Joel 2:31, 30. The World War made us familiar with the blood-red pillars of flame and smoke where heavy explosives were doing their work.

However, in the Spanish struggles of more recent times, it was seen how invention had improved upon the terrific forces in these bombs. Philip Jordan, in a book on the civil war in Spain, published in 1938, described the pillars of smoke rising from the battlefields:

“Where the planes dropped their bombs the earth rose suddenly in a dark column. When it could go no higher. the column split and the top spread out like a fan and rose again, grew lighter and disappeared like smoke.” “There Is No Return.”

“Blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke,” said the prophet. Nature has reproduced the picture in the flaming volcanic pillars of smoke; but man has done it also in these productions of new and more terrible agencies for the destruction of his fellows.

Scientific progress and invention have not changed human nature.

Satan the Destroyer

The prophet John, on the Isle of Patmos, was given a vision of the latter times, in which he saw evil spirits at work stirring up the spirit of war—the fallen angels, of course, as we know, who joined Satan’s rebellion against God in heaven, and who have worked all through history to destroy the creation of God on earth. These are the unseen influences that statesmen have had to wrestle with. So the prophet says: “They are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” Revelation 16:14-16.

This view makes clear what the forces are that peace loving statesmen seem powerless to stand against. It was a few years after the World War, while cabinets in various lands were struggling to lead the way toward disarmament, that the late Ramsay MacDonald, twice Premier of Britain, declared: “For the present general competition in arms among the nations it is difficult to say who is responsible. It would seem as if they were all bewitched, or laboring under some doom imposed upon them by devils. People are beginning to feel that there is something devilish in the operations now going on to increase armies, navies, and air forces.” - London Times, July 24, 1923.

But there is no other way than the sword in a world where sin has dominion. The moment sin entered heaven in Lucifer’s self-exaltation, -there was war in heaven.” Revelation 12:7. Satan was cast out of heaven. Now he knows that he has but a short time on earth; for the glorious Second Coming of Christ is to end his reign of destruction.

“The Sea and the Waves Roaring.” Luke 21:25

What this may mean for the future we know not; but in tidal waves and typhoons and hurricanes “roaring” from off the seas and over the lands, we have had sufficient in recent times to know that this sign is in process of fulfilling. About the year 1926 two forecasts were made by scientists:

Sir Oliver Lodge said: “Without doubt it will soon be possible for science to control the weather.”

Then from France came a forecast: “One of the foremost French scientists recently said: ‘Control of the weather is a possibility of the future.’ -- Woman’s Home Companion, November, 1926.

It seemed that in the years immediately following these predictions the elements were abroad in greater fury than ever before. In America just afterward, year following year, the Red Cross reported disasters, mainly by storm and flood, cloudbursts and drought, and dust storms (a new calamity), “greater in number than in any previous year since the organization.” The French fishermen, who have earned their livelihood on the North Atlantic all their lives, “averred,” said the Associated Press, “that the North Atlantic had ‘gone crazy.’ “

The elements smote suffering China in 1931 with such a flood that the Associated Press described it as “the greatest calamity of modern times.” The London Times called it “the worst flood in human

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memory.” The Gulf shores of America have heard the “roaring” of sea and waves in destructive hurricanes taking heavier toll than ever. More recently the worst storm known on these northern coasts came “shrieking” out of the sea over Long Island and New England. The magazine Time said: “Never has a hurricane struck a region so thickly populated and so unprepared.” - October 3, 1938.

The prophecy uttered on the Mount of Olives in 31 AD described our times more accurately than the predictions of the scientists in 1926.

No; science has no prospect of learning to “control the weather.” Rather-

“When were the winds Let slip with such a warrant to destroy? When did the waves so haughtily overleap Their ancient barrier, deluging the dry? Fires from beneath, and meteors from above, Portentous, unexampled, unexplained, Have kindled beacons in the skies. The old And crazy earth has had her shaking fits More frequent, and forgone her usual rest: And Nature seems with dim and sickly eye To wait the close of all.”

And What Next?

Thank God, there is a brighter outlook above. Christ’s prophecy does not end with the “distress of nations, with perplexity,” and the “fear” in hearts that are looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”

The next thing, in Christ’s great outline of prophecy, is the glorious coming of the Lord: “The powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads for your redemption draws nigh.” Luke 21:26-28.

He who died for our sins, upon the cross, is coming to save eternally all who are willing to be saved.

9. The Brightest Sign of All.

THIS gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:14.

So Christ’s great prophecy foretold. True to the “sure word of prophecy,” this has been the age of world-wide evangelism.

We can scarcely credit today the indifference and opposition, even in religious circles, that the pioneers of world missions had to meet. William Carey, preacher-shoemaker, in England, was a delegate to a Baptist ministers’ convention in 1786. He rose and asked the convention why the command of Christ, to go into all the world and teach all nations, should not be accepted as the duty of the church. Doctor Ryland, the presiding officer, rebuked him:

“Sit down, young man. You are a miserable enthusiast to ask such a question. When God wants to convert the world, He can do it without your help; and at least nothing can be done until a second Pentecost.”

This was the same Doctor Ryland who later said, after the movement began to bear fruit: ‘I believe God Himself infused into the mind of Carey that solicitude for the salvation of the heathen which cannot be fairly traced to any other source.’

The hour of the prophecy had struck. No opposition could turn Carey from the way. He was the chosen agent for the hour. He studied and wrote and prayed for light to know how to press the appeal for missions more clearly and powerfully upon the conscience of Christendom.

“So he goes on day after day,” said Mrs. Carey to Roland Evans, in the little Harvey Lane shop in Leicester, “hammering and reading, reading and hammering.”

The Spark That Set Off the Blaze

Carey, standing with leather apron, turned to Evans and spoke of a sermon he was to deliver at the coming ministers’ meeting at Nottingham.

“Here is the manuscript of it,” he said. “God spoke to me as I wrote it. I am praying that it will end

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in the founding of a society in our denomination for the spreading of the light of the gospel to the heathen peoples.”

That was the history-making sermon on the text: “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations. Spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shall break forth on the right hand and on the left. And thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.” Isaiah 54:2, 3.

The Lord did answer Carey’s prayer. Out of that sermon, with its two main heads, “Expect great things from God,” “Attempt great things for God,” came the beginning of modern world evangelization. “It was a spark dropped from heaven,” said James Montgomery, the poet. “It was the burning bush of missionary revelation,” said another. Carey and an associate sailed for India in 1792, opening the Baptist mission. At once other churches awoke.

The Miracle of the New Life

The miracle of missions is the miracle of the changed life. It is the miracle of God’s intervening hand. Sometimes it is the use of the simplest everyday incidents to start the up springing of a new life. The story of missions is full of the marvels of God’s overruling providence and transforming grace.

You have heard the story of the sailors who were shipwrecked many years ago in the South Pacific. Making their way by their small boat to an island, they crept up a hill to look over into a clearing where evidently was a village. Their fear was that the savages would kill and eat them. Creeping cautiously to the crest of the hill and looking anxiously over, they saw-unmistakably-a Christian chapel in the village, bearing a good imitation of a steeple. Relief and joy filled their hearts. They knew they were safe. Believers themselves, or unbelievers, they knew the signs of the religion that transforms savages. Cannibalism and a church steeple could never go together!

John Williams himself met with a surprise as he once approached the island of Tutuila. After he had put off in his small boat, the crowd on the shore looked so formidable that he asked his men to stop rowing, and had a season of prayer-his custom when approaching danger. Twenty yards from the shore the chief waded out to the boat.

“Son, he said, ‘will you not come on shore? Will you not land among us?’

“ ‘To this I replied,’ says Williams, ‘I do not know that I should trust myself. I have heard a sad account of you in this bay-that you have taken two boats, and that you are exceedingly savage; and perhaps when you get me into your possession, you will either injure my person or demand a ransom for my release.’

“ ‘Oh,’ he shouted, ‘We are not savage now; we are Christians.’

“ ‘You Christians?’ I said. ‘Where did you hear of Christianity?’

“ ‘Oh,’ he exclaimed, ‘a great chief from the white man’s country, named Williams, came to Savaii about twenty moons ago, and placed some tama-fal-lotu [workers of religion] there, and several of our people who were there began on their return to instruct their friends, many of whom have become sons of the Word. There they are; don’t you see them?’

“Looking in the direction to which he pointed, I saw a group of about fifty persons seated under the wide spreading branches of large trees and other trees, apart from those whom he had ordered to sit down along the beach. Every one of this group had a piece of white cloth tied around his arm. I inquired of the chief what this meant, and he replied, ‘They are Christians, and that cloth is to distinguish them from their heathen countrymen.’

“ ‘Why,’ I immediately exclaimed, ‘I am the person you allude to; my name is Williams. I took the workers of religion to Savaii twenty moons ago.’

“The moment he heard this he made a signal to the multitude, who sprang from their seats, rushed to the sea, seized the boat, and carried both it and us to the shore. Upon landing, Amoams, the chief, took me by the hand and conducted me to the Christians, and after the usual salutations, I inquired where they had heard of Christianity. Upon this, one of their number, rather more forward than his brethren, replied that he had been down to the ‘workers of religion,’ had brought back some knowledge, and was now engaged in imparting it to his countrymen. ‘There is our chapel,’ said he; ‘don’t you see it?’

“What Can One Man Do?”

Just after David Livingstone had planted his first station on the edge of Bechuanaland, in 1844, he felt upon his soul the burden, “Who will penetrate Africa?” Erelong he set his face toward the interior to

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spend his life in geographical explorations, hoping to open trails for commerce, and above all for missions.

“But what can one man do?” friends questioned doubtfully.

“I don’t know,” replied Livingstone, “but if no one goes in first, no one will ever follow.”

He himself never knew the marvelous results that God brought out of that life spent alone in the wilds. It is one of the miracles of missions. His constant prayer was that somehow God would use his work to open paths to the tribes and tongues of the interior.

When facing death from the savages on the Zambezi, in 1856, he wrote in his journal:

“O Jesus, grant me resignation to Thy will, and entire reliance on Thy powerful hand.... But wilt Thou permit me to plead for Africa? ... What an impulse will be given to the idea that Africa is not open if I perish now. . . . Leave me not, forsake me not.”

Again on his last birthday but one, in 1872, he wrote in his journal:

“My Jesus, my King, my life, my all; I again dedicate my whole self to Thee. Accept me, and grant, O gracious Father, that ere this year is gone I may finish my task.”

His last task, the finding of the source of the Congo, he hoped would close the geographical quest; and he had said, “The end of the geographical is to be the beginning of the missionary undertaking.” He then was to plead for missions for the interior. And then, before he had finished the geographical task, he died in that hut, alone, in Chitambo’s kraal, in what is now northeast Rhodesia. He died not knowing, that he had accomplished any great thing. The question, “What can one man do?” seemed to all human appearance well put. But how wondrously God wrought! He used Livingstone’s life and death to open the Dark Continent. The missionary’s African companions in travel loved him. They rudely embalmed his body, that they might carry it to his own people. They buried his heart under a tall tree, feeling that Africa should hold that; and after nine months they laid the body at the feet of the British consul in Zanzibar. England sent out a warship to bring the missionary home, and among the kings and queens and the great of earth buried in Westminster Abbey, the missionary’s body was laid away under the slab that reads,

“DAVID LIVINGSTONE
“MISSIONARY TRAVELER, PHILANTHROPIST”

The manner of his life and of his death, the fact that his heart was buried there in the heart of Africa, stirred Christendom. Society after society was organized to enter, commercial undertakings were organized to open avenues of trade. And so Providence answered the question that Livingstone could not answer, “What can one man do?”

Enduring Expectancy

The great gathering in Burma came among the hill tribes. Wonderfully Providence had prepared these peoples for the coming of the missionaries. Judson-pioneer missionary from America-was toiling in Burma not much more than a century ago, with but little to show, save as he was putting the Bible into Burmese. Then one day a Karen servant from the hill people recognized in the Holy Scriptures the “Book” that his people had been singing about for generations! Away back in their ancestral home in Western China or Central Asia, it may be, some early missionary undertaking had evidently reached their fathers, and taught them of God and of the death of the Son of God and of His promise to come again. They must have had some portion of the word of God, and then had lost it. All the centuries of their migrations and settlement in the hills of Burma, the village bards had kept alive the tradition of the lost Book of God.

Judson’s Karen servant hastened to let his people know that the white man had come with the lost Book. Thus began the spreading of the light over the Karen hills.

And still the preaching of the gospel message is saving men and demonstrating the miracle-working power of the word of God in all the earth.

10. The Special Gospel Message of Preparation

“Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come.” Revelation 14:6.