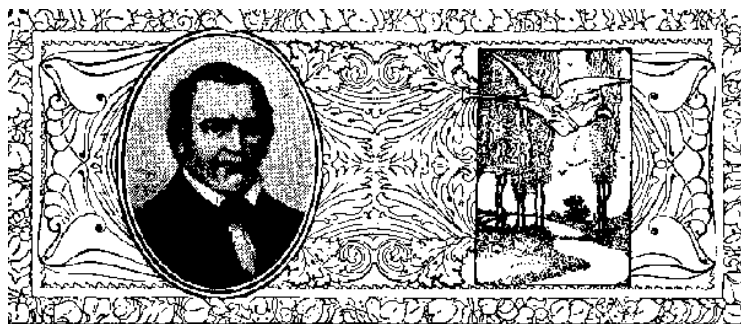


light, performing every duty which may be revealed, religion will inevitably degenerate into the observance of forms, and the spirit of vital godliness will disappear. This truth has been repeatedly illustrated in the history of the church. God requires of His people works of faith and obedience corresponding to the blessings and privileges bestowed. Obedience requires a sacrifice and involves a cross; and this is why so many of the professed followers of Christ refused to receive the light from heaven, and, like the Jews of old, knew not the time of their visitation.⁵¹⁶ Because of their pride and unbelief, the Lord passed them by, and revealed His truth to those who, like the shepherds of Bethlehem and the Eastern magi, had given heed to all the light they had received.

[317]

18. An American Reformer.



⁵¹⁶ Luke 19:44.

An upright, honest-hearted farmer, who had been led to doubt the divine authority of the Scriptures, yet who sincerely desired to know the truth, was the man specially chosen of God to lead out in the proclamation of Christ's second coming. Like many other reformers, William Miller had in early life battled with poverty, and had thus learned the great lessons of energy and self-denial. The members of the family from which he sprung were characterized by an independent, liberty-loving spirit, by capability of endurance, and ardent patriotism,—traits which were also prominent in his character. His father was a captain in the army of the Revolution, and to the sacrifices which he made in the struggles and sufferings of that stormy period, may be traced the straitened circumstances of Miller's early life.

He had a sound physical constitution, and even in childhood gave evidence of more than ordinary intellectual strength. As he grew older, this became more marked. His mind was active and well developed, and he had a keen thirst for knowledge. Though he did not enjoy the advantages of a collegiate education, his love of study and a habit of careful thought and close criticism rendered him a man of sound judgment and comprehensive views. He possessed an irreproachable moral character and an enviable reputation, being generally esteemed for integrity, thrift, and benevolence. By dint of energy and application he early acquired a competence, though his habits of study were still maintained. He filled various civil and military offices with credit, and the avenues to wealth and honor seemed wide open to him. [318]

His mother was a woman of sterling piety, and in childhood he had been subject to religious impressions. In early manhood, however, he was thrown into the society of deists, whose influence was the stronger from the fact that they were mostly good citizens, and men of humane and benevolent disposition. Living, as they did, in the midst of Christian institutions, their characters had been to some extent moulded by their surroundings. For the

excellencies which won them respect and confidence they were indebted to the Bible; and yet these good gifts were so perverted as to exert an influence against the word of God. By association with these men, Miller was led to adopt their sentiments. The current interpretations of Scripture presented difficulties which seemed to him insurmountable; yet his new belief, while setting aside the Bible, offered nothing better to take its place, and he remained far from satisfied. He continued to hold these views, however, for about twelve years. But at the age of thirty-four, the Holy Spirit impressed his heart with a sense of his condition as a sinner. He found in his former belief no assurance of happiness beyond the grave. The future was dark and gloomy. Referring afterward to his feelings at this time, he said:

“Annihilation was a cold and chilling thought, and accountability was sure destruction to all. The heavens were as brass over my head, and the earth as iron under my feet. Eternity—what was it? And death—why was it? The more I reasoned, the further I was from demonstration. The more I thought, the more scattered were my conclusions. I tried to stop thinking, but my thoughts would not be controlled. I was truly wretched, but did not understand the cause. I murmured and complained, but knew not of whom. I knew that there was a wrong, but knew not how or where to find the right. I mourned, but without hope.”

[319]

In this state he continued for some months. “Suddenly,” he says, “the character of a Saviour was vividly impressed upon my mind. It seemed that there might be a being so good and compassionate as to himself atone for our transgressions, and thereby save us from suffering the penalty of sin. I immediately felt how lovely such a being must be, and imagined that I could cast myself into the arms of, and trust in the mercy of, such a one. But the question arose, How can it be proved that such a being does exist? Aside from the Bible, I found that I could get no evidence of the existence of such a Saviour, or even of a future state....

“I saw that the Bible did bring to view just such a Saviour as I needed; and I was perplexed to find how an uninspired book should develop principles so perfectly adapted to the wants of a fallen world. I was constrained to admit that the Scriptures must be a revelation from God. They became my delight; and in Jesus I found a friend. The Saviour became to me the chiefest among ten thousand; and the Scriptures, which before were dark and contradictory, now became the lamp to my feet and light to my path. My mind became settled and satisfied. I found the Lord God to be a Rock in the midst of the ocean of life. The Bible now became my chief study, and I can truly say, I searched it with great delight. I found the half was never told me. I wondered why I had not seen its beauty and glory before, and marveled that I could have ever rejected it. I found everything revealed that my heart could desire, and a remedy for every disease of the soul. I lost all taste for other reading, and applied my heart to get wisdom from God.”⁵¹⁷

Miller publicly professed his faith in the religion which he had despised. But his infidel associates were not slow to bring forward all those arguments which he himself had often urged against the divine authority of the Scriptures. He was not then prepared to answer them; but he reasoned that if the Bible is a revelation from God, it must be consistent with itself; and that as it was given for man's instruction, it must be adapted to his understanding. He determined to study the Scriptures for himself, and ascertain if every apparent contradiction could not be harmonized. [320]

Endeavoring to lay aside all preconceived opinions, and dispensing with commentaries, he compared scripture with scripture by the aid of the marginal references and the concordance. He pursued his study in a regular and methodical manner; beginning with Genesis, and reading verse by verse, he proceeded no faster

⁵¹⁷ Bliss, S., “Memoirs of Wm. Miller,” pp. 65-67.

than the meaning of the several passages so unfolded as to leave him free from all embarrassment. When he found anything obscure, it was his custom to compare it with every other text which seemed to have any reference to the matter under consideration. Every word was permitted to have its proper bearing upon the subject of the text, and if his view of it harmonized with every collateral passage, it ceased to be a difficulty. Thus whenever he met with a passage hard to be understood, he found an explanation in some other portion of the Scriptures. As he studied with earnest prayer for divine enlightenment, that which had before appeared dark to his understanding was made clear. He experienced the truth of the psalmist's words, "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."⁵¹⁸

With intense interest he studied the books of Daniel and the Revelation, employing the same principles of interpretation as in the other scriptures, and found, to his great joy, that the prophetic symbols could be understood. He saw that the prophecies, so far as they had been fulfilled, had been fulfilled literally; that all the various figures, metaphors, parables, similitudes, etc., were either explained in their immediate connection, or the terms in which they were expressed were defined in other scriptures, and when thus explained, were to be literally understood. "I was thus satisfied," he says, "that the Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."⁵¹⁹ Link after link of the chain of truth rewarded his efforts, as step by step he traced down the great lines of prophecy. Angels of heaven were guiding his mind and opening the Scriptures to his understanding.

Taking the manner in which the prophecies had been fulfilled in the past, as a criterion by which to judge of the fulfilment of those which were still future, he became satisfied that the popular view of the spiritual reign of Christ—a temporal millennium

⁵¹⁸ Ps. 119:130.

⁵¹⁹ Bliss, "Memoirs of Wm. Miller," p. 70.

before the end of the world—was not sustained by the word of God. This doctrine, pointing to a thousand years of righteousness and peace before the personal coming of the Lord, put far off the terrors of the day of God. But, pleasing though it may be, it is contrary to the teachings of Christ and His apostles, who declared that the wheat and the tares are to grow together until the harvest, the end of the world;⁵²⁰ that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse;” that “in the last days perilous times shall come;”⁵²¹ and that the kingdom of darkness shall continue until the advent of the Lord, and shall be consumed with the spirit of His mouth, and be destroyed with the brightness of His coming.⁵²²

The doctrine of the world's conversion and the spiritual reign of Christ was not held by the apostolic church. It was not generally accepted by Christians until about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Like every other error, its results were evil. It taught men to look far in the future for the coming of the Lord, and prevented them from giving heed to the signs heralding His approach. It induced a feeling of confidence and security that was not well founded, and led many to neglect the preparation necessary in order to meet their Lord.

Miller found the literal, personal coming of Christ to be plainly taught in the Scriptures. Says Paul, “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God.”⁵²³ And the Saviour declares: “They shall *see* the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”⁵²⁴ He is to be accompanied by all the hosts

⁵²⁰ Matt. 13:30, 38-41.

⁵²¹ 2 Tim. 3:13, 1.

⁵²² 2 Thess. 2:8.

⁵²³ 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.

⁵²⁴ Matt. 24:30, 27, 31.

of heaven. "The Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him."⁵²⁵ "And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect."⁵²⁶

At His coming the righteous dead will be raised, and the righteous living will be changed. "We shall not all sleep," says Paul, "but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."⁵²⁷ And in his letter to the Thessalonians, after describing the coming of the Lord, he says: "The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Not until the personal advent of Christ can His people receive the kingdom. The Saviour said: "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." We have seen by the scriptures just given that when the Son of man comes, the dead are raised incorruptible, and the living are changed. By this great change they are prepared to receive the kingdom; for Paul says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."⁵²⁸ Man in his present state is mortal, corruptible;

[323]

⁵²⁵ Matt. 25:31-34.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ 1 Cor. 15:51-53.

⁵²⁸ 1 Cor. 15:50.

but the kingdom of God will be incorruptible, enduring forever. Therefore man in his present state cannot enter into the kingdom of God. But when Jesus comes, He confers immortality upon His people; and then He calls them to inherit the kingdom of which they have hitherto been only heirs.

These and other scriptures clearly proved to Miller's mind that the events which were generally expected to take place before the coming of Christ, such as the universal reign of peace and the setting up of the kingdom of God upon the earth, were to be subsequent to the second advent. Furthermore, all the signs of the times and the condition of the world corresponded to the prophetic description of the last days. He was forced to the conclusion, from the study of Scripture alone, that the period allotted for the continuance of the earth in its present state was about to close.

“Another kind of evidence that vitally affected my mind,” he says, “was the chronology of the Scriptures.... I found that predicted events, which had been fulfilled in the past, often occurred within a given time. The one hundred and twenty years to the flood (Gen. 6:3); the seven days that were to precede it, with forty days of predicted rain (Gen. 7:4); the four hundred years of the sojourn of Abraham's seed (Gen. 15:13); the three days of the butler's and baker's dreams (Gen. 40:12-20); the seven years of Pharaoh's (Gen. 41:28-54); the forty years in the wilderness (Num. 14:34); the three and a half years of famine (1 Kings 17:1);⁵²⁹ ... the seventy years' captivity (Jer. 25:11); Nebuchadnezzar's seven times (Dan. 4:13-16); and the seven weeks, threescore and two weeks, and the one week, making seventy weeks, determined upon the Jews (Dan. 9:24-27),—the events limited by these times were all once only a matter of prophecy, and were fulfilled in accordance with the predictions.”⁵³⁰

[324]

When, therefore, he found, in his study of the Bible, various

⁵²⁹ See Luke 4:25.

⁵³⁰ Bliss, “Memoirs of Wm. Miller,” pp. 74, 75.

chronological periods that, according to his understanding of them, extended to the second coming of Christ, he could not but regard them as the “times before appointed,” which God had revealed unto His servants. “The secret things,” says Moses, “belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever;”⁵³¹ and the Lord declares by the prophet Amos, that He “will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.”⁵³² The students of God's word may, then, confidently expect to find the most stupendous event to take place in human history clearly pointed out in the Scriptures of truth.

“As I was fully convinced,” says Miller, “that ‘all Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable;’⁵³³ that it came not at any time by the will of man, but was written as holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost,⁵³⁴ and was written ‘for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,’⁵³⁵ I could but regard the chronological portions of the Bible as being as much a portion of the word of God, and as much entitled to our serious consideration, as any other portion of the Scriptures. I therefore felt that in endeavoring to comprehend what God had in His mercy seen fit to reveal to us, I had no right to pass over the prophetic periods.”⁵³⁶

The prophecy which seemed most clearly to reveal the *time* of the second advent was that of Dan. 8:14: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” Following his rule of making Scripture its own interpreter, Miller learned that a day in symbolic prophecy represents a year;⁵³⁷ he

⁵³¹ Deut. 29:29.

⁵³² Amos 3:7.

⁵³³ See 2 Tim. 3:16.

⁵³⁴ 2 Peter 1:21.

⁵³⁵ Rom. 15:4.

⁵³⁶ Bliss, “Memoirs of Wm. Miller,” p. 75.

⁵³⁷ Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6.

saw that the period of 2300 prophetic days, or literal years, would extend far beyond the close of the Jewish dispensation, hence it could not refer to the sanctuary of that dispensation. Miller accepted the generally received view, that in the Christian age the earth is the sanctuary, and he therefore understood that the cleansing of the sanctuary foretold in Dan. 8:14 represented the purification of the earth by fire at the second coming of Christ. If, then, the correct starting-point could be found for the 2300 days, he concluded that the time of the second advent could be readily ascertained. Thus would be revealed the time of that great consummation, the time when the present state, with "all its pride and power, pomp and vanity, wickedness and oppression, would come to an end;" when the curse would be "removed from off the earth, death be destroyed, reward be given to the servants of God, the prophets and saints, and them who fear His name, and those be destroyed that destroy the earth."⁵³⁸ [325]

With a new and deeper earnestness, Miller continued the examination of the prophecies, whole nights as well as days being devoted to the study of what now appeared of such stupendous importance and all-absorbing interest. In the eighth chapter of Daniel he could find no clue to the starting-point of the 2300 days; the angel Gabriel, though commanded to make Daniel understand the vision, gave him only a partial explanation. As the terrible persecution to befall the church was unfolded to the prophet's vision, physical strength gave way. He could endure no more, and the angel left him for a time. Daniel "fainted, and was sick certain days." "And I was astonished at the vision," he says, "but none understood it."

Yet God had bidden His messenger, "Make this man to understand the vision." That commission must be fulfilled. In obedience to it, the angel, some time afterward, returned to Daniel, saying, "I am now come forth to give thee skill and

⁵³⁸ Bliss, "Memoirs of Wm. Miller," p. 76.

understanding;” “therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.”⁵³⁹ There was one important point in the vision of chapter eight which had been left unexplained, namely, that relating to time,—the period of the 2300 days; therefore the angel, in resuming his explanation, dwells chiefly upon the subject of time:

[326]

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.... Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself.... And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.”

The angel had been sent to Daniel for the express purpose of explaining to him the point which he had failed to understand in the vision of the eighth chapter, the statement relative to time,—“Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” After bidding Daniel “understand the matter, and consider the vision,” the very first words of the angel are, “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.” The word here translated “determined,” literally signifies “cut off.” Seventy weeks, representing 490 years, are declared by the angel to be cut off, as specially pertaining to the Jews. But from what were they cut off? As the 2300 days was the only period of time mentioned in chapter eight, it must be the period from which the seventy weeks were cut off; the seventy weeks must therefore be a part of the 2300 days, and the two periods must begin together. The seventy weeks were declared by the angel to date from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. If the date of this commandment

⁵³⁹ Dan. 9:22, 23, 25-27.

could be found, then the starting-point for the great period of the 2300 days would be ascertained.

In the seventh chapter of Ezra the decree is found.⁵⁴⁰ In its completest form it was issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, B.C. 457. But in Ezra 6:14 the house of the Lord at Jerusalem is said to have been built “according to the commandment [margin, decree] of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.” These three kings, in originating, re-affirming, and completing the decree, brought it to the perfection required by the prophecy to mark the beginning of the 2300 years. Taking B.C. 457, the time when the decree was completed, as the date of the commandment, every specification of the prophecy concerning the seventy weeks was seen to have been fulfilled. [327]

“From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks,”—namely, sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years. The decree of Artaxerxes went into effect in the autumn of B.C. 457. From this date, 483 years extend to the autumn of A.D. 27.⁵⁴¹ At that time this prophecy was fulfilled. The word “Messiah” signifies “the Anointed One.” In the autumn of A.D. 27, Christ was baptized by John, and received the anointing of the Spirit. The apostle Peter testifies that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.”⁵⁴² And the Saviour Himself declared, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.”⁵⁴³ After His baptism He went into Galilee, “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, *The time is fulfilled.*”⁵⁴⁴

“And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.”

⁵⁴⁰ Ezra 7:12-26.

⁵⁴¹ See Appendix.

⁵⁴² Acts 10:38.

⁵⁴³ Luke 4:18.

⁵⁴⁴ Mark 1:14, 15.

The “week” here brought to view is the last one of the seventy; it is the last seven years of the period allotted especially to the Jews. During this time, extending from A.D. 27 to A.D. 34, Christ, at first in person and afterward by His disciples, extended the gospel invitation especially to the Jews. As the apostles went forth with the good tidings of the kingdom, the Saviour's direction was, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”⁵⁴⁵

[328]

“In the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” In A.D. 31, three and a half years after His baptism, our Lord was crucified. With the great sacrifice offered upon Calvary, ended that system of offerings which for four thousand years had pointed forward to the Lamb of God. Type had met antitype, and all the sacrifices and oblations of the ceremonial system were there to cease.

The seventy weeks, or 490 years, especially allotted to the Jews, ended, as we have seen, in A.D. 34. At that time, through the action of the Jewish Sanhedrim, the nation sealed its rejection of the gospel by the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution of the followers of Christ. Then the message of salvation, no longer restricted to the chosen people, was given to the world. The disciples, forced by persecution to flee from Jerusalem, “went everywhere preaching the Word.” “Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.” Peter, divinely guided, opened the gospel to the centurion of Cæsarea, the God-fearing Cornelius; and the ardent Paul, won to the faith of Christ, was commissioned to carry the glad tidings “far hence unto the Gentiles.”⁵⁴⁶

Thus far every specification of the prophecies is strikingly fulfilled, and the beginning of the seventy weeks is fixed beyond question at B.C. 457, and their expiration in A.D. 34. From

⁵⁴⁵ Matt. 10:5, 6.

⁵⁴⁶ Acts 8:4, 5; 22:21.

this data there is no difficulty in finding the termination of the 2300 days. The seventy weeks—490 days—having been cut off from the 2300, there were 1810 days remaining. After the end of 490 days, the 1810 days were still to be fulfilled. From A.D. 34, 1810 years extend to 1844. Consequently the 2300 days of Dan. 8:14 terminate in 1844. At the expiration of this great prophetic period, upon the testimony of the angel of God, “the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” Thus the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary—which was almost universally believed to take place at the second advent—was definitely pointed out.

Miller and his associates at first believed that the 2300 days would terminate in the *spring* of 1844, whereas the prophecy [329] points to the *autumn* of that year.⁵⁴⁷ The misapprehension of this point brought disappointment and perplexity to those who had fixed upon the earlier date as the time of the Lord's coming. But this did not in the least affect the strength of the argument showing that the 2300 days terminated in the year 1844, and that the great event represented by the cleansing of the sanctuary must then take place.

Entering upon the study of the Scriptures as he had done, in order to prove that they were a revelation from God, Miller had not, at the outset, the slightest expectation of reaching the conclusion at which he had now arrived. He himself could hardly credit the results of his investigation. But the Scripture evidence was too clear and forcible to be set aside.

He had devoted two years to the study of the Bible, when, in 1818, he reached the solemn conviction that in about twenty-five years Christ would appear for the redemption of His people. “I need not speak,” says Miller, “of the joy that filled my heart in view of the delightful prospect, nor of the ardent longings of my soul for a participation in the joys of the redeemed. The Bible was now to me a new book. It was indeed a feast of reason; all

⁵⁴⁷ See Appendix.

that was dark, mystical, or obscure to me in its teachings, had been dissipated from my mind before the clear light that now dawned from its sacred pages; and oh, how bright and glorious the truth appeared! All the contradictions and inconsistencies I had before found in the Word were gone; and although there were many portions of which I was not satisfied I had a full understanding, yet so much light had emanated from it to the illumination of my before darkened mind, that I felt a delight in studying the Scripture which I had not before supposed could be derived from its teachings.”⁵⁴⁸

[330]

“With the solemn conviction that such momentous events were predicted in the Scriptures to be fulfilled in so short a space of time, the question came home to me with mighty power regarding my duty to the world, in view of the evidence that had affected my own mind.”⁵⁴⁹ He could not but feel that it was his duty to impart to others the light which he had received. He expected to encounter opposition from the ungodly, but was confident that all Christians would rejoice in the hope of meeting the Saviour whom they professed to love. His only fear was, that in their great joy at the prospect of glorious deliverance, so soon to be consummated, many would receive the doctrine without sufficiently examining the Scriptures in demonstration of its truth. He therefore hesitated to present it, lest he should be in error, and be the means of misleading others. He was thus led to review the evidences in support of the conclusions at which he had arrived, and to consider carefully every difficulty which presented itself to his mind. He found that objections vanished before the light of God's word, as mist before the rays of the sun. Five years spent thus, left him fully convinced of the correctness of his position.

And now the duty of making known to others what he believed to be so clearly taught in the Scriptures, urged itself with new

⁵⁴⁸ Bliss, “Memoirs of Wm. Miller,” pp. 76, 77.

⁵⁴⁹ Bliss, “Memoirs of Wm. Miller,” p. 81.

force upon him. "When I was about my business," he said, "it was continually ringing in my ears, 'Go and tell the world of their danger.' This text was constantly occurring to me: 'When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.'⁵⁵⁰ I felt that if the wicked could be effectually warned, multitudes of them would repent; and that if they were not warned, their blood might be required at my hand."⁵⁵¹

He began to present his views in private as he had opportunity, praying that some minister might feel their force and devote himself to their promulgation. But he could not banish the conviction that he had a personal duty to perform in giving the warning. The words were ever recurring to his mind, "Go and tell it to the world; their blood will I require at thy hand." For nine years he waited, the burden still pressing upon his soul, until in 1831 he for the first time publicly gave the reasons of his faith. [331]

As Elisha was called from following his oxen in the field, to receive the mantle of consecration to the prophetic office, so was William Miller called to leave his plow, and open to the people the mysteries of the kingdom of God. With trembling he entered upon his work, leading his hearers down, step by step, through the prophetic periods to the second appearing of Christ. With every effort he gained strength and courage as he saw the wide-spread interest excited by his words.

It was only at the solicitation of his brethren, in whose words he heard the call of God, that Miller consented to present his views in public. He was now fifty years of age, unaccustomed to public speaking, and burdened with a sense of unfitness for the

⁵⁵⁰ Eze. 33:8, 9.

⁵⁵¹ Bliss, p. 92.

work before him. But from the first his labors were blessed in a remarkable manner to the salvation of souls. His first lecture was followed by a religious awakening in which thirteen entire families, with the exception of two persons, were converted. He was immediately urged to speak in other places, and in nearly every place his labor resulted in a revival of the work of God. Sinners were converted, Christians were roused to greater consecration, and deists and infidels were led to acknowledge the truth of the Bible and the Christian religion. The testimony of those among whom he labored was, "A class of minds are reached by him not within the influence of other men."⁵⁵² His preaching was calculated to arouse the public mind to the great things of religion, and to check the growing worldliness and sensuality of the age.

[332]

In nearly every town there were scores, in some, hundreds, converted as the result of his preaching. In many places Protestant churches of nearly all denominations were thrown open to him; and the invitations to labor usually came from the ministers of the several congregations. It was his invariable rule not to labor in any place to which he had not been invited, yet he soon found himself unable to comply with half the requests that poured in upon him.

Many who did not accept his views as to the exact time of the second advent, were convinced of the certainty and nearness of Christ's coming and their need of preparation. In some of the large cities his work produced a marked impression. Liquor-dealers abandoned the traffic, and turned their shops into meeting-rooms; gambling dens were broken up; infidels, deists, Universalists, and even the most abandoned profligates were reformed, some of whom had not entered a house of worship for years. Prayer-meetings were established by the various denominations, in different quarters, at almost every hour, business men assembling at mid-

⁵⁵² Bliss, "Memoirs of Wm. Miller," p. 138.

day for prayer and praise. There was no extravagant excitement, but an almost universal solemnity on the minds of the people. His work, like that of the early Reformers, tended rather to convince the understanding and arouse the conscience than merely to excite the emotions.

In 1833 Miller received a license to preach, from the Baptist Church, of which he was a member. A large number of the ministers of his denomination also approved his work, and it was with their formal sanction that he continued his labors. He traveled and preached unceasingly, though his personal labors were confined principally to the New England and Middle States. For several years his expenses were met wholly from his own private purse, and he never afterward received enough to meet the expense of travel to the places where he was invited. Thus his public labors, so far from being a pecuniary benefit, were a heavy tax upon his property, which gradually diminished during this period of his life. He was the father of a large family, but as they were all frugal and industrious, his farm sufficed for their maintenance as well as his own.

[333]

In 1833, two years after Miller began to present in public the evidences of Christ's soon coming, the last of the signs appeared which were promised by the Saviour as tokens of His second advent. Said Jesus, "The stars shall fall from heaven"⁵⁵³ And John in the Revelation declared, as he beheld in vision the scenes that should herald the day of God, "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."⁵⁵⁴ This prophecy received a striking and impressive fulfilment in the great meteoric shower of November 13, 1833. That was the most extensive and wonderful display of falling stars which has ever been recorded; "the whole firmament, over all the United States, being then, for hours, in fiery commotion! No celestial phenomenon has ever occurred

⁵⁵³ Matt. 24:29.

⁵⁵⁴ Rev. 6:13.

in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with such intense admiration by one class in the community, or with so much dread and alarm by another.” “Its sublimity and awful beauty still linger in many minds.... Never did rain fall much thicker than the meteors fell toward the earth; east, west, north, and south, it was the same. In a word, the whole heavens seemed in motion.... The display, as described in Professor Silliman's Journal, was seen all over North America.... From two o'clock until broad daylight, the sky being perfectly serene and cloudless, an incessant play of dazzlingly brilliant luminosities was kept up in the whole heavens.”⁵⁵⁵

“No language, indeed, can come up to the splendor of that magnificent display; ... no one who did not witness it can form an adequate conception of its glory. It seemed as if the whole starry heavens had congregated at one point near the zenith, and were simultaneously shooting forth, with the velocity of lightning, to every part of the horizon; and yet they were not exhausted—thousands swiftly followed in the tracks of thousands, as if created for the occasion.”⁵⁵⁶ “A more correct picture of a fig-tree casting its figs when blown by a mighty wind, it was not possible to behold.”⁵⁵⁷

[334]

In the *New York Journal of Commerce* of Nov. 14, 1833, appeared a long article regarding this wonderful phenomenon, containing this statement: “No philosopher or scholar has told or recorded an event, I suppose, like that of yesterday morning. A prophet eighteen hundred years ago foretold it exactly, if we will be at the trouble of understanding stars falling to mean falling stars, ... in the only sense in which it is possible to be literally true.”

Thus was displayed the last of those signs of His coming,

⁵⁵⁵ Devens, R. M., “American Progress; or, The Great Events of the Greatest Century,” ch. 28, pars. 1-5.

⁵⁵⁶ Reed, F., in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, Dec. 13, 1833.

⁵⁵⁷ “The Old Countryman,” in *Portland evening Advertiser*, Nov. 26, 1833.

concerning which Jesus bade His disciples, “When ye shall see all these things, *know* that it is near, even at the doors.”⁵⁵⁸ After these signs, John beheld, as the great event next impending, the heavens departing as a scroll, while the earth quaked, mountains and islands removed out of their places, and the wicked in terror sought to flee from the presence of the Son of man.⁵⁵⁹

Many who witnessed the falling of the stars, looked upon it as a herald of the coming judgment,—“an awful type, a sure forerunner, a merciful sign, of that great and dreadful day.” Thus the attention of the people was directed to the fulfilment of prophecy, and many were led to give heed to the warning of the second advent.

In the year 1840, another remarkable fulfilment of prophecy excited wide-spread interest. Two years before, Josiah Litch, one of the leading ministers preaching the second advent, published an exposition of Revelation 9, predicting the fall of the Ottoman empire. According to his calculations, this power was to be overthrown “in A.D. 1840, sometime in the month of August;” and only a few days previous to its accomplishment he wrote: “Allowing the first period, 150 years, to have been exactly fulfilled before Deacozes ascended the throne by permission of the Turks, and that the 391 years, fifteen days, commenced at the close of the first period, it will end on the 11th of August, 1840, when the Ottoman power in Constantinople may be expected to be broken. And this, I believe, will be found to be the case.”⁵⁶⁰

[335]

At the very time specified, Turkey, through her ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself under the control of Christian nations. The event exactly fulfilled the prediction.⁵⁶¹ When it became known,

⁵⁵⁸ Matt. 24:33.

⁵⁵⁹ Rev. 6:12-17.

⁵⁶⁰ Litch, Josiah, article in *Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy*, Aug. 1, 1840.

⁵⁶¹ See Appendix.

multitudes were convinced of the correctness of the principles of prophetic interpretation adopted by Miller and his associates, and a wonderful impetus was given to the Advent Movement. Men of learning and position united with Miller, both in preaching and publishing his views, and from 1840 to 1844 the work rapidly extended.

William Miller possessed strong mental powers, disciplined by thought and study; and he added to these the wisdom of heaven, by connecting himself with the Source of wisdom. He was a man of sterling worth, who could not but command respect and esteem wherever integrity of character and moral excellence were valued. Uniting true kindness of heart with Christian humility and the power of self-control, he was attentive and affable to all, ready to listen to the opinions of others, and to weigh their arguments. Without passion or excitement, he tested all theories and doctrines by the word of God; and his sound reasoning, and thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, enabled him to refute error and expose falsehood.

Yet he did not prosecute his work without bitter opposition. As with earlier Reformers, the truths which he presented were not received with favor by popular religious teachers. As these could not maintain their position by the Scriptures, they were driven to resort to the sayings and doctrines of men, to the traditions of the Fathers. But the word of God was the only testimony accepted by the preachers of the advent truth. "The Bible, and the Bible only," was their watchword. The lack of Scripture argument on the part of their opponents was supplied by ridicule and scoffing. Time, means, and talents were employed in maligning those whose only offense was that they looked with joy for the return of their Lord, and were striving to live holy lives, and to exhort others to prepare for His appearing.

Earnest were the efforts put forth to draw away the minds of the people from the subject of the second advent. It was made to appear a sin, something of which men should be ashamed, to

study the prophecies which relate to the coming of Christ and the end of the world. Thus the popular ministry undermined faith in the word of God. Their teaching made men infidels, and many took license to walk after their own ungodly lusts. Then the authors of the evil charged it all upon Adventists.

While drawing crowded houses of intelligent and attentive hearers, Miller's name was seldom mentioned by the religious press except by way of ridicule or denunciation. The careless and ungodly, emboldened by the position of religious teachers, resorted to opprobrious epithets, to base and blasphemous witticisms, in their efforts to heap contumely upon him and his work. The gray-headed man who had left a comfortable home to travel at his own expense from city to city, from town to town, toiling unceasingly to bear to the world the solemn warning of the judgment near, was sneeringly denounced as a fanatic, a liar, a speculating knave.

The ridicule, falsehood, and abuse heaped upon him called forth indignant remonstrance, even from the secular press. "To treat a subject of such overwhelming majesty and fearful consequences," with lightness and ribaldry, was declared by worldly men to be "not merely to sport with the feelings of its propagators and advocates," but "to make a jest of the day of judgment, to scoff at the Deity Himself, and contemn the terrors of His judgment-bar."⁵⁶²

The instigator of all evil sought not only to counteract the effect of the advent message, but to destroy the messenger himself. Miller made a practical application of Scripture truth to the hearts of his hearers, reproving their sins and disturbing their self-satisfaction, and his plain and cutting words aroused their enmity. The opposition manifested by church-members toward his message, emboldened the baser classes to go to greater lengths; and enemies plotted to take his life as he should leave

[337]

⁵⁶² Bliss, "Memoirs of Wm. Miller," p. 183.

the place of meeting. But holy angels were in the throng, and one of these, in the form of a man, took the arm of this servant of the Lord, and led him in safety from the angry mob. His work was not yet done, and Satan and his emissaries were disappointed in their purpose.

Despite all opposition, the interest in the Advent Movement had continued to increase. From scores and hundreds, the congregations had grown to as many thousands. Large accessions had been made to the various churches, but after a time the spirit of opposition was manifested even against these converts, and the churches began to take disciplinary steps with those who had embraced Miller's views. This action called forth a response from his pen, in an address to Christians of all denominations, urging that if his doctrines were false, he should be shown his error from the Scriptures.

“What have we believed,” he said, “that we have not been commanded to believe by the word of God, which you yourselves allow is the rule, and only rule, of our faith and practice? What have we done that should call down such virulent denunciations against us from pulpit and press, and give you just cause to exclude us [Adventists] from your churches and fellowship?” “If we are wrong, pray show us wherein consists our wrong. Show us from the word of God that we are in error; we have had ridicule enough; that can never convince us that we are in the wrong; the word of God alone can change our views. Our conclusions have been formed deliberately and prayerfully, as we have seen the evidence in the Scriptures.”⁵⁶³

From age to age the warnings which God has sent to the world by His servants have been received with like incredulity and unbelief. When the iniquity of the antediluvians moved Him to bring a flood of waters upon the earth, He first made known to them His purpose, that they might have opportunity to

[338]

⁵⁶³ Bliss, “Memoirs of Wm. Miller,” pp. 250, 252.

turn from their evil ways. For a hundred and twenty years was sounded in their ears the warning to repent, lest the wrath of God be manifested in their destruction. But the message seemed to them an idle tale, and they believed it not. Emboldened in their wickedness, they mocked the messenger of God, made light of his entreaties, and even accused him of presumption. How dare one man stand up against all the great men of the earth? If Noah's message were true, why did not all the world see it and believe it? One man's assertion against the wisdom of thousands! They would not credit the warning, nor would they seek shelter in the ark.

Scoffers pointed to the things of nature,—to the unvarying succession of the seasons, to the blue skies that had never poured out rain, to the green fields refreshed by the soft dews of night,—and they cried out, “Doth he not speak parables?” In contempt they declared the preacher of righteousness to be a wild enthusiast; and they went on, more eager in their pursuit of pleasure, more intent upon their evil ways, than ever before. But their unbelief did not hinder the predicted event. God bore long with their wickedness, giving them ample opportunity for repentance; but at the appointed time His judgments were visited upon the rejecters of His mercy.

Christ declares that there will exist similar unbelief concerning His second coming. As the people of Noah's day “knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so,” in the words of our Saviour, “shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”⁵⁶⁴ When the professed people of God are uniting with the world, living as they live, and joining with them in forbidden pleasure; when the luxury of the world becomes the luxury of the church; when the marriage bells are chiming, and all are looking forward to many years of worldly prosperity,—then, suddenly as the lightning flashes from the heavens, will come the end of their

[339]

⁵⁶⁴ Matt. 24:39.

bright visions and delusive hopes.

As God sent His servant to warn the world of the coming flood, so He sent chosen messengers to make known the nearness of the final judgment. And as Noah's contemporaries laughed to scorn the predictions of the preacher of righteousness, so in Miller's day many, even of the professed people of God, scoffed at the words of warning.

And why were the doctrine and preaching of Christ's second coming so unwelcome to the churches? While to the wicked the advent of the Lord brings woe and desolation, to the righteous it is fraught with joy and hope. This great truth had been the consolation of God's faithful ones through all the ages; why had it become, like its Author, "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" to His professed people? It was our Lord Himself who promised His disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself."⁵⁶⁵ It was the compassionate Saviour, who, anticipating the loneliness and sorrow of His followers, commissioned angels to comfort them with the assurance that He would come again in person, even as He went into heaven. As the disciples stood gazing intently upward to catch the last glimpse of Him whom they loved, their attention was arrested by the words, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."⁵⁶⁶ Hope was kindled afresh by the angel's message. The disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."⁵⁶⁷ They were not rejoicing because Jesus had been separated from them, and they were left to struggle with the trials and temptations of the world, but because of the angel's assurance that He would come again.

⁵⁶⁵ John 14:3.

⁵⁶⁶ Acts 1:11.

⁵⁶⁷ Luke 24:52, 53.

The proclamation of Christ's coming should now be, as when made by the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem, good tidings of great joy. Those who really love the Saviour cannot but hail with gladness the announcement founded upon the word of God, that He in whom their hopes of eternal life are centered, is coming again, not to be insulted, despised, and rejected, as at His first advent, but in power and glory, to redeem His people. It is those who do not love the Saviour, that desire Him to remain away; and there can be no more conclusive evidence that the churches have departed from God than the irritation and animosity excited by this Heaven-sent message. [340]

Those who accepted the advent doctrine were roused to the necessity of repentance and humiliation before God. Many had long been halting between Christ and the world; now they felt that it was time to take a stand. "The things of eternity assumed to them an unwonted reality. Heaven was brought near, and they felt themselves guilty before God."⁵⁶⁸ Christians were quickened to new spiritual life. They were made to feel that time was short, that what they had to do for their fellow-men must be done quickly. Earth receded, eternity seemed to open before them, and the soul, with all that pertains to its immortal weal or woe, was felt to eclipse every temporal object. The Spirit of God rested upon them, and gave power to their earnest appeals to their brethren, as well as to sinners, to prepare for the day of God. The silent testimony of their daily life was a constant rebuke to formal and unconsecrated church-members. These did not wish to be disturbed in their pursuit of pleasure, their devotion to money-making, and their ambition for worldly honor. Hence the enmity and opposition excited against the advent faith and those who proclaimed it.

As the arguments from the prophetic periods were found to be impregnable, opposers endeavored to discourage investiga-

⁵⁶⁸ Bliss, "Memoirs of Wm. Miller," p. 146.

[341]

tion of the subject, by teaching that the prophecies were sealed. Thus Protestants followed in the steps of Romanists. While the papal church withholds the Bible⁵⁶⁹ from the people, Protestant churches claimed that an important part of the sacred word—and that the part which brings to view truths specially applicable to our time—could not be understood.

Ministers and people declared that the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation were incomprehensible mysteries. But Christ directed His disciples to the words of the prophet Daniel concerning events to take place in their time, and said, “Whoso readeth, let him *understand*.”⁵⁷⁰ And the assertion that the Revelation is a mystery, not to be understood, is contradicted by the very title of the book: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass.... *Blessed* is he that *readeth*, and they that *hear* the words of this prophecy, and *keep* those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”⁵⁷¹

Says the prophet: “Blessed is he that readeth”—there are those who will not read; the blessing is not for them. “And they that hear”—there are some, also, who refuse to hear anything concerning the prophecies; the blessing is not for this class. “And keep those things which are written therein”—many refuse to heed the warnings and instructions contained in the Revelation; none of these can claim the blessing promised. All who ridicule the subjects of the prophecy, and mock at the symbols here solemnly given, all who refuse to reform their lives, and prepare for the coming of the Son of man, will be unblessed.

In view of the testimony of Inspiration, how dare men teach that the Revelation is a mystery, beyond the reach of human understanding? It is a mystery revealed, a book opened. The study of the Revelation directs the mind to the prophecies of

⁵⁶⁹ See Appendix.

⁵⁷⁰ Matt. 24:15.

⁵⁷¹ Rev. 1:1-3.