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SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

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READERS of our "Signs" may not be aware that we have a rival, entitled "The Christian Herald and Signs of our Times." It is a curious publication of the extreme Low Church and Dissenting type, and contains much deeply-interesting information about "things not seen as yet." One of the "signs of our times" is the Eastern question, and "the most tangible proximate sign for the Christian to discern is the return of the Jews to Palestine." It appears that the Jews are to go to Palestine, and a covenant is to be made between these said Jews and

“Anti-Christ:” Anti-Christ is to be discovered by his making the covenant: let us hope that it will not be Disraeli; but is not his very name a terrible sign? Besides, the white horse of the Revelation must be the white horse of Hanover, and its rider Death, the destruction that Disraeli, as Anti-Christ, will bring upon the land. When this covenant is made Christ will come and take up the Church, his Bride, into the air, “but his coming then will be comparatively invisible to the world. The marriage of the Lamb with his Bride raised and translated to the heavens will be celebrated, and the position and duties of the component parts of this mystical body will all be duly arranged before Christ’s further descent from the air to the earth, when the prophecy will be fulfilled, ‘Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him.’ The glorified Church will descend with him. It may, and probably will, be several years before Christ thus descends visibly in the sight of the world, after the translation of the wise virgins.” These years may be called the honeymoon of Christ and his wise virgins. Then the Jews in Palestine are to be attacked, and Jesus is to appear as their king and deliverer; it is to be hoped that he will be more successful than he was last time. Well may the writer of all this marvellous nonsense begin by saying that “This shuts out all human wisdom:” Ghosts are only visible when all light is excluded. We are next taken to the resurrection, and told all about resurrection bodies. “The resurrection body of the saints shall be invested with divine attributes. A radiance shall encircle it brighter than the noon-day sun.”

“The celestial body shall possess angelic power, and move with the velocity of electricity. It will possess all the sprightliness and activity of the heavenly bodies. No violence can either break or derange it. Its senses and organs will be intensified and enlarged. Its vision far-reaching as the telescope which sweeps the heavens, and yet minute as the microscope. There shall be no old age, offensive appearance, or incipient

disease afflicting the resurrection body. Immortal youth, requiring no relaxation or repose, shall adorn the heavenly body."

Imagine "sprightly heavenly bodies;" cheerful suns and joking moons. But if these new bodies rush about with the velocity of electricity they will be very dangerous, both to their neighbours and to themselves; the destructive power of a flash of lightning will be nothing in comparison to the effect of two clashing resurrection bodies. It will, however, be pleasant for ladies to learn that

"The resurrection body shall appear in angelic costume. The angel that appeared to the women at the sepulchre resembled 'a young man' clothed in a long white garment, his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. Thus shall the celestial body shine in all the beauty and freshness of youth, clearer than crystal, fairer than the virgin rose."

They will be made "beautiful for ever" in fact; a celestial Madame Rachel will enamel them once for all. "The sheeted dead bursting the cerements of mortality, and assuming crystallised and ethereal forms." But the sheets of many will long since have mouldered away, and the cerements will have turned into dust, grass, sheep, and other forms of life, and can scarcely be "burst." Nor is this all.

"The dying groans of creation will be heard, and the elements melt with fervent heat. The whole fabric of nature will be in a state of conflagration. The rumblings of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions will make this stricken planet quiver. Behold that vast procession descending from heaven. The Judge descends, arrayed in judicial vesture."

It would be interesting to know where the heaven is which "the vast procession descends from." We can plumb the depths of space on every side this planet for millions on millions of miles, but the strongest telescope fails to bring us back news of any heaven from which this procession can come "down" to earth. Many tales the telescope whispers to us, tales

of marvellous wonder, tales of far-off fairy lands of nebulae not yet stars, but no stories of a heaven above them all whence Jesus and his legions can descend to desolate this fair world. Of course, in all this judgment and resurrection, readers of the wrong "signs of the times" will find themselves in sore trouble. "What shall be the doom of the sensualist, the sceptic, the sneering world, when the flaming judge appears?" And then they call on the mountains in the proper and orthodox fashion. We fancy that would be a poor resource. There are not mountains enough in the world to cover all the sceptics that have existed. It is curious how Christians persist in bracketing "sensualists and sceptics," and yet no two classes could be more utterly opposed to each other. Scepticism implies thought and study, close examination, and earnest research; such qualities can never be found in the sensualist, where the passions master the brain. But it is the old story, "if you have no case abuse the other side," and Christians only follow the example of the Bible, which classes together the ill-living and the unbeliever.

Does any one desire to know the most advantageous position in heaven, according to Mr. Spurgeon? You are not to "lie like slaves *beneath* the throne;" nor "*far off from* the throne;" nor "*behind* the throne;" nor "*upon* the throne," where "the proud infidel wants to get;" but only "*before* the throne," where "they can always look at God, and God can always look at them." What a strange omnipresent God, who can only see people in front of one special place.

Dr. Talmage is, however, the most notable contributor to the "Signs," and he begins his discourse as follows:—

"Seven is the favourite number in the Bible. Seven days for the week. Seven fat kine for Pharaoh's vision. Seven years of service that Jacob may win Rachel. Seven rams' horns to blow down the walls of Jericho. Seven golden vials. Seven last plagues. Seven thunders. Seven candlesticks.

Seven stars. Seven churches. Seven loaves to feed the thousands. The lamb with seven horns. The woman with seven devils."

Fortunately we do not get beyond the seven devils, and seven Dr. Talmages would be far worse in the way of spirits; think what the infliction would be of seven preachers of the following type:—

"Leave the caravan of iniquity in the desert; throw away your account books; quit your reckoning. Hark! from the throne of God the proclamation, "Thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more." Release! signed in tears, sealed in blood, written on heavenly parchment, recorded in eternal archives. The black ink of the indictment is written all over with the red ink of the cross."

Is it conceivable that sane people listen to this sort of rant Sunday after Sunday, and enjoy it? But Dr. Talmage is wise in his generation, like unto one of the children of this world:—

"I specially recognise in this presence this morning, the manner in which you came to the rescue when recently our Lay College building was threatened by the foreclosure of a mortgage of 15,000 dollars. You did magnificently. *God will give back to you every dollar: first in worldly prosperity, and then in spiritual and eternal dividends.*"

That is the way to induce people to subscribe: "You will get back here all you give, and eternal life into the bargain." It is the very argument of Jesus: "An hundredfold in this present world, and in the world to come everlasting life."

Among the many May meetings we notice one of the Home and Colonial School Society, at which Canon Hoare delivered his soul against the School Board system of Education. The Canon has been travelling in America, and he visited the "best school" in New York, containing 600 children. He seems to have been much delighted at first with the order and regularity that prevailed, and on his asking questions in history and geography he found them well taught. Then the Canon explained that he was

going to cross to England, and "I suppose you have all read of one who could walk across the roughest sea, and who did not want steam. Who was that?" "The mistress then came to my daughter, who sat close by me, and said: 'If you please, he must not speak on that subject. Pray stop your father.' My daughter then pulled me by the coat-tail, and stopped me, telling me what had been said to her. I might speak of the Queen of England, the Czar of Russia, the Emperor of China, but not one word about the Lord Jesus Christ might I utter in that room. This broke us up entirely;" and Canon Hoare thinks that "the tendency of the present day, or at least the tendency of the whole education system, is to edge out Christian truth." Canon Hoare is perfectly right, for in a country whose citizens are of all faith and of no faith, no education can be made compulsory which is not purely secular. The State has no right to compel the children of Free Thinkers or of Jews to learn Christianity, nor to instruct the children of Christians in Free Thought or Jewish principles. No parent has a right to object that the State does not furnish religious or anti-religious teaching to his children, for the legitimate rights of conscience would thereby be interfered with with regard to the other children in the school. But very naturally do the clergy object to any training which has not a distinctly religious bias, for they complain dolorously that unless they train the children they will never gain any influence over them in later years. They are perfectly right. No one trained without belief from childhood is likely to join the Church when he grows up, for he will be without the habit-thought which accepts a faith unquestionably and wears it half-unconsciously from fashion, and not from conviction. A purely secular education will make *thinkers*, and that is a consummation not to be desired by the priesthood.

The Society for the Conversion of the Jews seems

to be more blessed by the Lord with the good things of this world than with the conversion of souls. Money flows in very plentifully, but the jewels eternal very slowly. A Jew seems to cost between 5,000*l.* and 10,000*l.* to convert, and then he is apt to go back again when business becomes flourishing. About two Jews are said to have been converted abroad last year, and the *Jewish World* sneers mercilessly at the small success of the Christians. Just now, that very liberal paper appears to act as a kind of friend in need to distressed vicars and curates, and within its columns a voice is heard, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, parsons weeping for the hindrances to free speech, and refusing to be comforted because they are not at liberty. These utterances are valuable and most suggestive. A "country vicar" writes:—

"The more antiquated and hoary, the more authoritative and sacred is the symbolum. The whole truth was discovered, think some pious folk, or was revealed, in the remote past; and all modern light and inspirations are a delusion unless they go to confirm old legends. Moreover, the old legends must be taken, as my early tutor used to phrase it, literally, and construed grammatically, and they are sure to read right. So literally, indeed, are they often taken, that the teacher has reason to feel that either he himself or some of his hearers prefer darkness to light."

A "country curate" says:—

"Like him I have taken vows and feel responsibilities, and I may add that, like him, I am dissatisfied. I have long borne these difficulties, long groaned under the weight of the chains which hang so heavily upon my internal convictions. But what am I to do? I have a wife and family, and they form in themselves substantial reasons for me to appear weekly, and act contrary to my own most cherished opinions. I cannot dig, and to beg I am ashamed. Can you or your readers suggest any means by which I can escape a thralldom grievous to bear? My case is that of too many in the English Church, and also, I doubt not, in the various communities existing outside the Establishment."

Another remarks:—

"I could once, theologically, make two and two into five, but I have been for years gradually losing the capacity in consequence of the study of the dangerous sciences of physics, metaphysics, and historical criticism."

And to these cries from the house of bondage is added a manly letter from an "ex-parson," wherein he blames the Rationalistic Clergy for their outward conformity to a creed which they have outgrown:—

"Many of them, from mere fear of privation in case of withdrawal from the pulpit, go on gagging themselves, searing their consciences, and petrifying themselves into monuments of self-deception by using phrases which are untrue to their convictions. Why don't they come out and prove the reality of their zeal for truth and freedom by quitting their anomalous position, daring to be free and honest, regardless of consequences? Why don't they become throughout leaders, instead of, as they are, in most cases, truculent followers of their people? Never did martyr of old, through suffering rack or flame, win a crown more worthy than the prize of self-respect, liberty, and honour, which is only to be won by vacating a position, necessarily hollow and corrupting to him who in his convictions has outlived it."

Not only does the *Jewish World* thus offer an opportunity of free speech to Christian clerics, but it also boldly leads the way to free investigation of creeds; for it challenges all improbable things to the bar of reason to show cause why they should be believed. "Admitting as we do the omnipotence of the Great Creator, we honour him when we question that which seems improbable. This will appear, we doubt not, clear to all. With God, we feel and think all things are possible. It does not follow, however, when certain things are put forward for our acceptance by men like ourselves, that we should admit the possibility before having investigated the probability. This will at all times be found a safe guide from the errors alike arising from credulity and superstitious inferences." A spirit such as this is the true spirit of the rationalist, whatever may be the conclusions to which it leads. "We cannot accept things contrary to our common

sense, no matter who utters them. . . . In past ages false deductions were more liable to be made than at present. The onward stride of science has enabled us to comprehend more clearly than our forefathers, hundreds of years since." Free Thought among the Jews seems to be advancing hand-in-hand with Free Thought among the Christians, and is making the efforts of conversion societies more hopeless than ever.

A curious book has just been issued, entitled, 'Discussion in General on Christianity, translated from the Arabic language, by His Excellency Abdul Hamed Bey.' It consists of three chapters on "The Trinity," on "The inconsistency of the four writers of the Gospel, and the character of Christ as a Redeemer;" and on "Testimony that Mahommed is the apostle of God." The discussion of the Trinity is ably argued, and the special sonship of Jesus denied, it being urged that the doctrine of the Trinity has only been taught since the time of Christ, and that if Christ had been in existence prior to his birth, such pre-existence would no doubt "have been revealed to the Children of Israel," that if God called Christ his Son, the title was not unique, for "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born." (Ex. iv. 22). "It is needless to say, if Christ was born without a father, and God called him his son, naturally it follows that Adam, Melchisedec, Israel and others being in the same degree, eminence and position relative to Christ, they must also be Gods as Jesus is." That the whole life of Jesus is against the theory of his divinity, and his behaviour after the resurrection is conclusive evidence that he was only man. "Is it consistent with reason, and could it be possible for the Supreme God, who is a most Holy Spirit, to show his hands and his feet to prove that he is formed of flesh and bone, and eat broiled fish and honeycomb?" "Divinity and humanity are too

opposite in nature to blend and unite together. Could fire and water, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, ever be united? if so, then indeed divinity and humanity might unite." "Who dares to say that God, the most merciful, the most benign, retaineth his anger and is unforgiving, so that a Redeemer is requisite? . . . Why should Christ feel more compassion for mankind than the merciful and benign Father of the universe?" "Looking up at the firmament and contemplating the boundless universe, we find that this earth of ours is like a grain of sand of the sea-shore, a drop in an ocean; then such being the case, we wonder at the absurdity of the Christian doctrine that the Supreme Being (to whom be glory for ever and ever) not forgiving the human race out of his own goodness and clemency, but sending his pretended son to this mite of dirty earth to go through the absurd tragedy of the crucifixion and all belonging to it, for what? to save us contemptible worms from punishment." Such is the doctrine of the Redeemer and the Trinity seen from the standing point of a believer in Mohammed, who believes in, and who draws many arguments from the Old Testament Scriptures. The inconsistencies of the Evangelists are somewhat sharply touched upon, and it is urged that they calumniate Jesus, "the holy messenger of God," by ascribing to him unworthy actions, like the cursing of the fig-tree, "an act quite foreign to his blessed and holy nature."