

THE
SIGNS OF THE TIMES

DISCERNED AND IMPROVED,

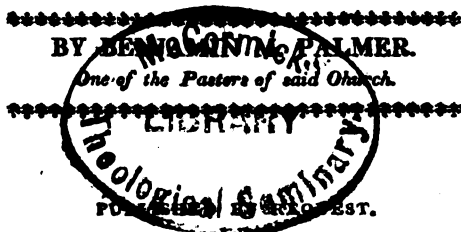
IN TWO SERMONS,

DELIVERED IN THE INDEPENDENT

OR

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

CHARLESTON, S. C.



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THE
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Theological Seminary
Signs of the Times

Matthew xvi. 3. } last Clause.—“ *Can ye not discern the signs of the Times?*”

“ My Father,” said Jesus to the Jews upon a certain occasion, “ worketh hitherto, and I work.” Jehovah’s operations in nature, in providence and grace, are wonderful, and should be “ sought out by all them that have pleasure therein.” But, partly from the constant pressure of external objects on the senses, the invisible nature of spiritual, and the remoteness of eternal things; and partly from that depravity, which sin has spread through all our powers, matters, in which we are most interested, are either not discerned at all, or discerned only to be rejected. No people on earth ever presented a more painful specimen of the correctness of the remark just made, than the Pharisees of the Saviour’s day. Their prejudices often so darkened their understanding as to prevent them from discerning the truth; or so corrupted their hearts, that when it was discerned, they maliciously opposed it. They came to Jesus repeatedly, demanding of him, sometimes in general terms a sign, at other times with more precision, a sign from heaven, in proof of his Messiahship. The Saviour, on the occasion to which our text has reference, with the mingled emotions of displeasure and of grief, asked his tempters (for they made the demand of him only to tempt him) how it was that they could discern the face of the sky, and yet could not discern the signs of the times. They were, it would seem, remarkably weatherwise—could conjecture with much sagacity and correctness, when a shower was to be expected, and when a day of serenity and sunshine to be looked for. But they either were, or affected to be, entirely unimpressed with the idea, unconvinced with the evidence, that the times of the Messiah were at hand, and that Jesus was the person, who was invested with that character. In vain were his miracles wrought to satisfy their enquiries—in vain did the Holy Spirit in visible form, rest upon him at his Baptism—in vain had the voice proclaimed, “ this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”—in vain had the time expired, pointed out with such critical precision by the prophet Daniel for his coming, and in vain was evidence given by the departure of the sceptre from Judah, that Shiloh had come. In the face of all this, the countrymen of Jesus persist in asking him, “ shew us a sign from heaven.” To this demand Jesus very pertinently and properly replied, by asking “ can ye not discern the signs of the times.” Every period of the world has its particular signs, and it behoves the men of every

generation to enquire what the signs of the particular age in which they live, are, and what are the duties required, the conduct recommended, and the obligations imposed by them.

The purport of the ensuing discourse will be simply this,

1. To ascertain, what are the particular and distinguishing signs of the times in which we live.—

2. What we are to understand by the expression "*discerning the signs of the times*," which is certainly recommended as a duty, inasmuch as the want of that discernment in the Jews is reprehended as a sin.

1. What are the peculiar and distinguishing signs of the times in which we live. And if we take a survey of the events that have transpired, and the schemes that have been set on foot in the human world, and especially in the christian world during the last score of years, we shall find, that the signs of the present times are,

1. A union among different denominations of christians hitherto unprecedented, and a more general agreement than has ever before been witnessed, to put bigotry to death. Men are beginning to find out at length, after the lapse of nearly three centuries from the commencement of the glorious reformation, that they have a right to think for themselves, but no right to think for others, nor to allow others to think for them. They are beginning to see, that persons may have all the essential ingredients of a christian character, and yet be far from entertaining the same apprehensions on many of the minor doctrines of christianity, or of its external forms and ceremonies.

Formerly, it was thought sufficient to brand a person with heresy and with infamy, to find out that he was a churchman or a dissenter—with the former every man was wrong, who was without the pale of that church, which civil authority had seen fit to establish—with the latter nothing could be right, that stood in any connection with that system which the state had set up and declared paramount. Formerly it was deemed a very important circumstance in the estimate of a christian character, whether the persons who laid claim to it were of this or of that denomination. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was the constant cry of blind prejudice in the mouth of all or almost all the different sections of the christian church in regard to every other branch of the great christian community. It mattered not, what the temper of an individual indicated, what his conduct testified, how loudly or explicitly his life spoke. It was enough to spoil all his excellencies, to ruin all his virtues, to say "he follows not with us." Bigotry with all its self-importance could cry down every thing that came not up to its precise measure, by giving out to its deluded votaries "the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are we." But, my brethren, the world is seeing better times, the church is feeling in a more christian manner. And even in the country of establishments, the laudable example has begun to be discerned, in a degree far beyond whatever has appeared before, of a concentration of the religious forces of different denominations on at least some objects. The British and Foreign Bible Society

has formed a rallying point, around which all that bear the name of christian may gather. Associations for missionary purposes also, embracing christians of different names, are less unknown now than they used to be. Societies for diffusing religious information, and for exciting a religious spirit and feeling by the circulation of Tracts, also embody the Disciples of Jesus of various names. In a variety of respects christians have learned and are daily learning, that the "kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The barriers that divide the Redeemer's Disciples from each other are not quite so numerous, nor the distance at which children of the same family stand from each other quite so wide, as they used to be. It is true, there is still too much of the unhallowed spirit of bigotry, but it is some consolation to reflect, that it is less general and less deeply rivetted than was once the case. An increasingly Catholic Spirit must be hailed with joy as one promising sign of the present times. While we speak however with much commendation of the growing liberality of the children of God towards each other, we must not be considered as taking favourable notice of that kind of charity, which holds it as a matter of indifference, what doctrinal sentiments a man embraces, and that would represent the influence of error to be equally great or equally good with that of truth. We consider the term bigotry as implying such a rivetted attachment to the mere externals of religion, rites, modes and forms, and administration of church government, as to exclude from the charity of our hearts and from the Table of the Lord, all who do not in these things adopt our views and conform to our practice. This is the kind of spirit, in the destruction of which we ought to rejoice, and its visible decay is among the encouraging tokens of the age in which we live.

(2.) The rapid increase among christians of societies for evangelical and religious purposes, the zeal with which they are supported, and the success with which they are crowned, form another interesting sign of the times. In perusing the periodical religious publications of the day, both in foreign countries and our own, one cannot help observing, how much energy and fervour are manifested by the friends of the Saviour through the channel of the above-named associations. It is only twelve years, since the idea was formed of the utility and importance of instituting Bible Societies, and how very rapidly have they multiplied, and what an incalculable immensity of good have they effected! The experiment was hazarded, and the success of it has been inconceivable. Already there are several hundreds* of these interesting institutions scattered over the face of christendom, and yet, numerous as they are, it is found that still more and more are necessary. Besides the immense and indescribable good they have effected in furnishing millions with the word of life, not only in our language and in our own country, but in all the languages and countries of Europe, and

* One thousand.

In very many of the heathen tongues and heathen nations, they have been also the happy means of bringing the different and distant parts of the christian world to a more intimate and interesting acquaintance with each other. Mutual prejudices have in many instances subsided, and joint and general efforts have been made to diffuse the light and joy of revelation among the numerous tribes of men. Not only have all the sections of the protestant world combined their efforts in this sublime scheme, but even among Papists, one of whose radical principles it was to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people, a few of these societies have been formed and patronized. There is in Germany at least one Bible Society among Roman Catholics, and many of the religious instructors in that department of the church countenance and encourage the distribution of the scriptures. This interesting monument of christian zeal and charity, Bible Societies, is the peculiar honor of the age in which we live; such a plan has been unknown, probably unthought of before.

Tract Societies also must be considered as reflecting peculiar honour on the present æra of Christendom; for in no former period was the scheme invented. In this affair indeed christians have learned a useful lesson from their adversaries. Before the Disciples of Jesus thought of this contrivance for the diffusion of religious truth and influence, the arch-infidel Voltaire with his sagacious co-adjutors had set a similar engine in operation, to aid the cause of infidelity, and subvert the kingdom of the Saviour. They printed at their joint expense and circulated gratis or for a very trifling sum many thousands of popular tracts, calculated to unhinge men's belief in the gospel, to set them free from the fetters of conscience, and to render them familiar with crimes and immorality. Christians took the hint, and for once at least learned a useful lesson from the "children of this world who are always wiser in their generation than the children of light." Societies therefore for the gratuitous distribution and circulation of religious tracts are well known throughout England and over several countries of Europe, and within a few years have been formed and are multiplying in our own land. These also, besides the good they do to many persons into whose hands the Tracts come, have a very happy tendency to diminish the spirit of prejudice and bigotry, and to draw nearer to each other those whom a jaundiced eye long prevented from discovering, that they were brethren. And though this effect in Tract Societies is not, and cannot be expected to be so great as in Bible Societies, yet it is sufficiently great to render such Societies worthy of support and patronage for this reason only, if there were no other to recommend them. If they do not embosom all denominations, they embrace a considerable number, who otherwise might have remained still apart from each other. The missionary spirit, and the numerous missionary societies to which that spirit has given rise, and which in their turn tend to cherish and increase that spirit, are worthy of notice in this place. Designs of this nature have been usually heretofore limited to the denomination which has formed them: no single association of this

nature embraced more christian sects than one. But the age in which we live, has witnessed the existence of a Missionary Society in London, embracing members of the establishment, and four different denominations of dissenters in that country, Independents, Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists. This society, though composed of such different materials, still exists and still flourishes. Missionary institutions, whose operations are intended to be both foreign and domestic, have been exceedingly multiplied in our age, both in Europe and America.

Our country, attentive to the signs of the times, has caught the spirit which originated elsewhere, and the beneficial effects of her exertions are felt on the remote shores of India,* as well as in some of the innumerable desolate places within our own borders. Auxiliary female associations in aid of these interesting objects have been formed in considerable numbers in the northern and in some of the middle states. *Moral societies* are another form of association, which owe their existence to the times in which we live. Their object is to discountenance and suppress by every possible means the flagrant immoralities that overwhelm and disgrace as well as threaten to ruin the land; such as intemperance, profane swearing, gambling, Sabbath-breaking and the foul but fashionable and honorable mode of committing murder by duelling. These institutions produce their effect, by encouraging and aiding, by countenancing and protecting the magistrate in the execution of the laws; by lodging in due form that information against transgressors, which no single individual has courage to attempt; by refusing to deal with or to give a suffrage for persons habitually guilty of these or similar flagrant enormities. These *moral societies*, short as has been their duration yet, have been found productive of incalculable good. The swearer, ashamed of his crime, as silly, ridiculous and useless, as it is presumptuous, and without excuse, has feared an oath, or has vented the impious blasphemy of his lips, only when he had around him souls kindred to his own. The drunkard, instead of staggering in his vomit about the streets as a public nuisance, has either reformed from his vile habit, or enjoyed the luxury of it in the spot where he took the inebriating draught. The Sabbath-breaker has paid at least an outward respect to the fourth commandment, however little his heart may have been attached to it; or if he has still dared to trample this divine order under foot, it has been within his own enclosure. In similar secrecy must the gamester carry on his nefarious practices, and the cold-blooded murderer, with all his gallantry and all his honor about him, has been obliged either to abandon his bloody and atrocious purpose, or steal away to some remote part of the land, to pollute a soil which knows him not. Facts of this nature exist in sufficient number and notoriety to demonstrate the utility of these moral societies, and to bring home to the hearts of those

* Five American Missionaries are already located in India, and five more are now on their way.

who formed them or belonged to them, the most comfortable, luxurious, and conscience-approving reflections.

Societies for educating indigent, but pious young men for the gospel ministry, are another recent institution in our country, called into existence by the signs of the times and the exigencies of the church. It has been discovered, that the harvest always great, is now greater than ever—that the labourers always few, are now, in comparison of the extent of the field which they are called to cultivate, fewer than ever. To meet these growing exigencies, and to answer these increasingly loud demands, Christians, and others who are attached to Christianity merely from political motives and humane and social feeling, have remembered, that the gold and the silver are the Lord's, and that they themselves are appointed stewards for its judicious management and disposal. They have therefore opened their hearts, their hands and their purses, in the belief that the Lord has need of them, and that it is their highest honor, that they can succour him by relieving his church. Many parts of this church planted in the wilderness, and in the solitary places of our country and elsewhere, are now panting for that bread and water of life, with which we are fed even to satiety. These in many months do not enjoy the privileges, which fall to our lot upon a single Sabbath. These are our brethren, once the inhabitants of the Atlantic States, once visitants of the sanctuary, once sitting under the joyful sound of the gospel; but a necessity, which they could not control, of providing for the wants of themselves and families, has compelled them to emigrate to our western wilds, where land and living were cheap, and the necessities and conveniences of life more abundant and attainable. Perhaps a worthy spirit of patriotism also animated some to take possession of these untenanted grounds, that they might fill our country with cities and people it with inhabitants. But what were their several motives it does not become us suspiciously to enquire, but rather to ascertain their wants and rejoice in as well as aid the prospect of their supply. Discerning, pious and patriotic minds have discovered, by actual and accurate research, that the increase of qualified and capable ministers of the gospel falls considerably short of the increase of our population.* This important, humiliating and affecting discovery first suggested the thought of originating those societies, which we just now mentioned. Christians reflected and it was a rational and sage reflection, that their children might, not many years hence, be compelled by necessity or induced by speculation or adventure to remove to these regions of spiritual dreariness, and the thought, that they might be without the means of grace, was excessively afflicting to their hearts. They resolved therefore, it should not be their fault, if such should prove the melancholy lot of their dear offspring. The thought rent their very hearts, that those children whom they were now dandling on their knees, whom perhaps they had by the solemn rite of Baptism, accompanied by

* For painfully interesting information on this subject see Tract No. 76, a pamphlet circulated by the Tract Society of this City.

the prayer of faith, dedicated to the God of their Fathers, who, while they remained under the parental roof, enjoyed religious privileges, might one day remove to a region, where from year to year not one solitary voice would be heard sounding the Trump of Zion, or making one joyful noise upon God's Holy Mountain. Accordingly, at New-Haven, in Boston, and at Princeton, as well as in various other places, these societies have sprung into existence, with a number of auxiliary ones, consisting some of males, others of females. All the societies that have been mentioned, and others still that might be named, are one of the most striking and peculiar, the most animating and encouraging signs of our times.

3. Remarkable revivals of religion and those in great numbers, are again unquestionably one of the most prominent signs of the present time. This is a term perhaps not understood by many among us: the thing has so seldom occurred to any extent in this city, (perhaps not within the remembrance of any of us) that those who have not witnessed the fact, may not clearly comprehend the meaning of the word, by which it is expressed. A revival of religion may then be defined to be simply this: a time, when the truths of the gospel, which are ordinarily heard with indifference by the generality of those who attend on preaching, make such a powerful, such a deep, such a general and such an effectual impression on the hearts of men, as to excite peculiar notice, to change in a manner the whole face of the congregation or community in which it happens. It differs from solitary instances of conversion; not in kind, but in extent; in the number of subjects on which it operates, and in some peculiar circumstances which attend it. Revivals of religion owe their existence to a peculiar influence from on high, without which influence a Paul with his flaming zeal and fervent piety may plant, and an Apollos with his sublime and commanding eloquence water what his brother Paul has planted, entirely in vain. God gives the increase. And sometimes it is an abundant increase. "Times of refreshment come from the presence of the Lord"—"the Lord" to use the very expression of scripture, "revives his work in the midst of the years." Twenty, thirty, fifty or a hundred hearts at once or more feel the "arrows of the Almighty sticking fast within them," and the word of God, the sword of the Almighty, piercing them through and discerning the very thoughts and intents of their hearts." When such a revival of religion takes place, the poor worthless instrument who has been for many years perhaps "labouring in vain and spending his strength for nought," finds such an astonishing effect taking place from his ministry without any thing in him or in his services or qualifications to produce it, that he goes to God in the overwhelming fulness and overflowing gratitude of his heart, and cheerfully gives him all the glory. Revivals of religion commence with deep convictions of sin and keen distress on account of it, in the hearts of multitudes, who were before careless and "at ease in Zion," and they issue in the consolation that arises from a believing sense of God's pardoning mercy in the Redeemer. Such in a few words is the nature, and such the circumstances of that religious work, which we denomi-

nate a revival of religion. And such revivals, we affirm, to be among the peculiar characteristics and the distinguishing signs of the present times. Among the Congregational Churches in each of the Northern States, among the Episcopal, Congregational and Baptist Churches in Rhode Island, in a great number of the Presbyterian Churches in the middle States, and perhaps in other churches such times have recently been known, and such manifestations of divine power and grace have been exhibited, that enemies as well as friends have been compelled to say, "this is the work of God." While speaking of revivals of religion, it would be utterly unpardonable not to notice, that in them some of the principal Colleges in our land have largely shared. In Middlebury, Dartmouth, and Yale Colleges, a great number, in the last particularly, half or more than half the Students have been convinced of sin, and are believed, (on what in the christian world are usually considered good grounds for such a belief) to have "passed from death unto life," *i. e.* from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We notice the revival in Princeton College last, because the circumstances of it are very peculiar. It is stated on competent authority, so competent as to be made a matter of ecclesiastical record, that a majority of the Students of that seminary have been renewed by the grace of God, and that out of the remaining part, a large number are under serious and deep impressions. Now, when the character of this Institution for a number of years past is seriously considered,—when the well-established fact is stated,—that for several years previous to the revival, the College was a frequent, in some degree a constant scene of tumult and disorder, of rebellion and disorganization, of dissipation and infidelity, of extravagance and vice,—that it probably took the lead in these respects of all other literary institutions in the land; that God should so signally and so conspicuously shower down his blessing upon it and revive his work in it, and that without the intervention of other than ordinary means, is a matter that calls for the devoutest gratitude of christians, and for the calm contemplation, the dispassionate examination of infidels and sceptics, and those religionists who sneer at what are called revivals of religion. Let the latter classes take the matter into serious consideration—let the former class fall before the mercy-seat and acknowledge "this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes."

4. Another very interesting sign of the present times, one not less remarkable, if not even more observable than any that have yet been noticed, is the concert for prayer among christians in the four quarters of the world. In regions the most remote from each other, among persons differing in climate, complexion, manners, habits, language, governments, differing in fact in almost every thing, but in the name and in the nature of christians, it is an understood business, that they shall all unite in setting apart some portion of the first Monday in every month for the express purpose of importuning with one voice and with one accord, the father of mercies, that he would revive his work, that he would evangelize the nations, that he would "give to his Son the heathen for his inhe-

ritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." The solitary cry to this effect of the Christian in his closet, the social cry of himself and of his household at the family altar—the cry of the minister of the gospel on his watch-tower, in the name of his people and in connection with them, has long been lifted up. But never until within a year or two has the astonishing spectacle been exhibited, of christians of different names and in every nation and in all the four quarters of the world, agreeing to meet their God and each other at the throne of grace, as nearly as may be at one and the same moment, and unitedly to intreat him to "remember Zion, to repair her waste places, to lengthen for her her cords and to strengthen her stakes and to make Jerusalem a praise in all the earth." And yet, my brethren, this scene, which Angels must delight to witness, is now in operation. In Europe, and in the missionary establishments of Asia, in a very considerable part of America, and in the missionary stations in Africa, the day above named is understood and recognized as one, upon which the Disciples of the Redeemer will concentrate their praying energies, and at or about the same time millions of hearts be lifted up to the hearer of prayer, besieging the throne of grace with that inspired and of course acceptable petition "thy kingdom come." "This is certainly a new thing under the sun." Other ages knew nothing of it—ancient times brought not such a thing to pass. It was reserved to be one of the discriminating properties of our day, one of the peculiar signs of the favoured times, in which we live.

5. Another, and the last sign of the present times, which we shall now notice, is the conversion of a more than usual number of distinguished persons among Jews, Mahometans and Heathens, and the more than usual success of recent attempts to evangelize the idolatrous world. It has sometimes happened, that a few solitary instances have occurred of Jews, Mahometans and Heathens, abandoning the religion of their ancestors, and embracing the doctrines of the cross. But the instances were rare and attracted not much notice. Within a few years more instances of this nature have occurred, than during a long period of time before. The natural descendents of the "father of the faithful" have in greater numbers than ordinary, and from the higher sphere of life, embraced that seed of Abraham, in whom "all the families of the earth were to be blessed," and have become preachers of the faith, which, from infancy they had been taught to detest. Among the devotees of the Arabian Impostor—among the bigotted and bitter Disciples of Mahammed, similar instances have occurred. The name of Sabat, his distinguished origin, and his conversion to the christian faith, must be familiar to all who have been conversant with a recent and excellent production called "The Star in the East." The missions that have of late years been attempted and established in the Eastern world, have met with fewer impediments, have made more rapid and respectable progress, and promise to be crowned with more success than have ever attended former exertions in this field. On the very spot where Christian Missionaries have been planted, is that bible

translated and printed and from thence circulated, whose direct tendency and influence is to overturn the fabrics of gentile superstition and idolatry; and yet the work goes on unmolested. Such then, my brethren, as have been mentioned, are the signs of our times. We do not pretend to have introduced all the particulars that might be classed under this denomination. But we have presented you with some of the principal and most prominent. From the meagre sketch of them that we have now had time to delineate, do they not appear in a high degree interesting? Are not our curiosity, our anxiety, our enquiry awakened, and our best feelings excited at the recital? Do we not ask almost involuntarily, what are we to do in such a case? What part have we to act? What share to take? Such thoughts are natural and proper. We shall endeavour to meet them under the second general branch of our discourse, in which it was proposed to enquire, what we are to understand by *discerning* the signs of the Times. But we have already exhausted on the first enquiry the ordinary portion of time allotted to this exercise of the sanctuary, and must defer the remaining part of our subject to another opportunity. On what has been said may God command his blessing.

SECOND SERMON

ON

Matthew xvi. 3. last clause "*Can ye not discern the signs of the Times?*"

"Come, behold the works of the Lord; what desolations he hath made in the earth." Thus did the pious king and sweet Psalmist of Israel call upon the children of men to turn their profitable meditations upon the displays of power which the God of the universe was exhibiting before their eyes. Whether the terrors of the Lord make the world to tremble, and his tremendous judgments shake the nations, or whether his peaceful, silent, salutary footsteps are to be traced—whether he be terrible or merciful in his dealings with the children of men, all who have eyes to see ears to hear, minds to contemplate or hearts to feel, ought to *feel*, and manifest a deep and lively interest in his proceedings. The scriptures clearly teach that this is our duty, and stamp with criminality every individual who is chargeable with its neglect. A woe for instance is pronounced on them, who in a time of general calamity "put far away the evil day," indulge themselves in luxurious living, are indifferent to the woes of others, "drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." When Hezekiah was recovered from a malady that was likely to prove mortal the Holy Ghost has recorded it with displeasure of him, that "he rendered not again, according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up," and notices also the painful consequences of his insensibility. "Therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem." If we overlook or misimprove our personal mercies or personal sufferings, the father of our spirits is displeased: if we prove incorrigible under his public judgments, or continue irreclaimable by his public mercies, we increase his displeasure, we multiply upon us the tokens of his anger. Thus it was with the Pharisees, and the body of the Jewish nation; because they did not discern the signs of the times, and knew not the day of their merciful visitation, "wrath came upon them speedily to the uttermost." And thus must it be feared it will prove with others who disregard the tokens of Jehovah's power, presence and favor.

In our last discourse we observed, that every age of the world had its peculiar signs, and that it concerned the people of every generation to discover, understand and lay to heart the signs of the period in which they lived, and to stand prepared to perform the duties which those signs indicated and imposed. We noticed five remarkable signs of the present time, viz. increasing union among christians; the rapid increase and vast success of societies for moral and religious purposes,—numerous, extensive and remarkable revivals of religion in communities, in churches and in colleges,—a

general and unusual concert for prayer,—and more frequent and striking conversions from Judaism, Mahometanism and paganism to christianity, than have been formerly known. To these we might have added others, worthy of particular notice, especially this, [the decided countenance given and the lively interest taken by several of the crowned heads of Europe in establishments designed for the circulation of the Holy Oracles, and the propagation of the everlasting gospel.] In this respect too, more than in any age that has elapsed, has intimation been given of the near approach of the day when, “kings shall be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to the church of Christ.” But it is time to proceed to the

2. General enquiry we proposed, viz. what we are to consider as implied in the expression, “discerning the signs of the times.” Unquestionably something important must be considered as conveyed by the term: the Saviour meant to find great and just fault with those of his cotemporaries who lacked this discernment. To discern the signs of the times is,

1. To become acquainted with their existence—to know that things are so. The Pharisees appeared and professed to be blind to the evidences of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ—pretended that they had no good grounds for believing him to possess the qualifications he ascribed to himself, or to be the personage which he claimed to be. If their ignorance on this subject was owing to want of enquiry or attention, they were culpable; if to the prevalence of prejudice, bigotry or pride, they were much more so. To discern the signs of these times is to become informed of them, by making ourselves acquainted with the several facts that have been adduced as constituting them. Shall such astonishing events, such interesting scenes as we have enumerated and descanted on, be in existence in such a degree, to such an extent, and we know nothing about them? To what can this ignorance be owing, and how may it be removed? Is it not owing to indifference and to want of enquiry? If we were but half as desirous of knowing the signs of the times, or took any thing like the same interest in them, as we do in a thousand things of vastly inferior moment, how readily, how easily and how effectually might we know what God is doing, what man is doing, what christians are doing in the world! [In our own immediate community, from some cause or another the means of obtaining information of what is passing in the religious world are extremely scanty.] From the want of a periodical publication among ourselves for communicating intelligence of this nature, we are kept in darkness, while a flood of light is pouring in upon other places. Could we get embarked in this cause sufficient zeal, ability and leisure, and command sufficient public support and countenance to such an object, it might perhaps be found practicable to establish among ourselves a vehicle of religious intelligence that might be the means of awakening us from our slumbers, of opening our eyes on the wonderful works of God, and the co-operating agency and instrumentality of those men who are led by the Spirit of God. With such examples before our eyes we might feel ourselves sweetly urged and powerfully constrained to “go and do

likewise." But if we are not ripe for such an undertaking ourselves, if we have not the zeal, the talents, the leisure, the industry or the perseverance necessary to it; or if we have not a sufficient excitement of religious feeling in the christian part of the community to ensure success to such an undertaking, we may with a very little trouble and at a very trifling expense possess ourselves of those useful periodical publications on this subject, which are so ably conducted and so generously supported in other parts of our land. Thus, instead of continuing fast asleep, or "standing all the day idle," while our brethren elsewhere are wide awake and incessantly active, working while the day lasts, we too might "come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty," we too might be provoked to a becoming jealousy and laudable emulation. Such publications as those to which we have just alluded, and which may be procured for a trifling sum, have had the happiest effect in diffusing religious knowledge, and in "provoking christians to love and to good works." And, since wars have ceased to rage, and tranquility has at least for a moment settled upon the nations, there have been issued several religious newspapers having the same object in view with pamphlets of larger size. Publications like these generally diffused have effected abundant good already, and, more generally circulated, would effect abundantly more. Many, who now most cordially wish well to Zion, but are discouraged with the idea, that the "set time to favour her is not yet come,"—unacquainted also with any newer or more efficient plan to aid her interests than they have long known, would soon discover, that she is already "rising and shaking herself from the dust," and that the ingenuity of christians is continually inventing, and the spirit and the providence of God directing to, newer and nobler schemes for her advancement, than have ever heretofore been known. Next to becoming acquainted with the signs of the times,

2. To *discern* the signs of the times is, to hail with joy the existence of those that are favourable, and to do all in our power to help forward their design. Almost every thing that God does for his church, and almost every thing that he will do, he appoints to be done through the agency and instrumentality of man. He can work without means, or if he pleases to employ them at all, he can select those which would in themselves be the fittest for his purpose. He could introduce the agency of beings superior to man: but in all his dispensations, and especially in the evangelical, he does not choose to adopt either the one or the other of these modes, but prefers to bring into action for the accomplishment of his purposes human means and human energies. "Glorious things are spoken of Zion the city of our God," but they must be brought about by the agency of Zion's children. The king of Zion "has the hearts of all men in his hands to turn them whithersoever he will," and he secretly and invisibly incites them, yet in a way perfectly compatible with the natural freedom of the human will, to accomplish all his pleasure. It seems impossible to account for the astonishing and cotemporaneous movements of the christian world at the present day on any other principle than that just adduced. Why

have none of these numberless schemes that have within a few years in such rapid succession been brought into being for the furtherance of the gospel, for the melioration of the condition of mankind, and the emancipation of the world from spiritual bondage and death, been thought of sooner? Were our ancestors in Christ less pious, less zealous, less concerned for the glory of God, less interested in the welfare of the church, less solicitous for the good of man, than christians of the present day? Did their bosoms glow with a less fervid or less pure flame of love to God and man? Nothing of this kind can be pretended. "In labours they were more abundant" than we; "to prisons and to death" they were cheerfully borne; "the spoiling of their goods they took joyfully." They wrote folios where their descendants write duodecimos. Yet they seem never to have thought of one of those numberless contrivances which their posterity have framed for the diffusion of the truth. The disparity between them and us is indeed partly to be accounted for by the comparative intellectual darkness in which the world lay involved in their day, when knowledge of every description was limited to a much smaller number of individuals than at present. But surely not altogether, not chiefly in that circumstance are we to seek a solution of the question. Why is our age so far beyond all former ones, in the invention, the origination, the multiplication, and the efficiency of the schemes for christianizing the globe? We must not disown the mind of God in, we cannot discard the hand of Jehovah from, this thing.

Ought we not then so to *discern* the signs of our own times, as to feel the conviction irresistibly impressed upon our minds, that "the Lord's time is come," that his people should hold themselves in readiness to lend him their arm for the accomplishment of his purposes; to loan him their substance for the erection or enlargement of his spiritual house; to furnish the "ways and means" for that spiritual expedition on which the Captain of Salvation is going among the nations, "conquering and to conquer." In the dark ages of the world, *nominal christians*, under the influence of strong delusion, went with carnal weapons in their hands on a religious crusade to recover the holy land from the occupancy of Infidels, or to extort from them a hypocritical profession of the gospel. In this illuminated age *real christians* have undertaken the same enterprize, not with swords and shields and instruments of slaughter; but with that spiritual weapon, and that alone, the word of God. With this they storm the citadel of sin, pull down the strong holds of satan, subvert, not by the shedding of blood, but by the influence of evangelical truth, the empire of idolatry, of superstition and imposture, and level with the ground the throne of Antichrist. While such operations are going on, and such designs are had in view, are we satisfied to look on, as idle, curious or amazed spectators, folding our hands, and asking in astonishment "what do these things mean?" What do they mean? They are full of meaning—they are rich in import—they are fraught with instruction—they carry with them a load of obligation, on those who have never yet embarked in these laudable enterprizes which have the

good of mankind for their object and extend their important influence to and through eternity; and this load they deposit on our shoulders. Will we bear it willingly, patiently, cheerfully and joyfully, or unfeelingly roll it back on those who began so long before us to take their share and bear their part, and who will carry off all the honor, if we decline to participate it with them. It must not, cannot be.

3. In order fully to *discern* the signs of the times, we should notice their increase, trace their connection and mark their success. We may be mistaken as to our judgment of the good or bad character, the beneficial or evil tendency of one or two solitary and disconnected facts or events. But when we meet with a series of contemporary or successive occurrences, all bearing towards the same point, all having the same ultimate tendency, all possessing the same essential features, or features nearly and strongly akin to each other; we may form an opinion and hazard the expression of it with less delicacy and less hesitation. Now, the signs of the times, which we noticed in a former discourse, all correspond to this description, all agree in these grand outlines. The leading events which were represented as constituting the signs of our times, great and important as they are, each one in itself, assume more magnitude and are clothed with more importance, when viewed in connection and taken as a whole. [It seems as if every thing was conspiring together in the *moral* and *religious* world, and a multitude of things in the *political* world too, either to introduce a new and better state of thing; or to designate clearly that this new and better state of things in many respects actually exists. All the particulars that have been mentioned, have occurred within about twenty years, an extremely short period for the simultaneous occurrence of such singular and stupendous events. No century of years before has ever given rise to any thing at all comparable with it. We feel almost insuperably constrained to mention here, what we have not noticed in any other part of our discourse, the abolition of the slave-trade—the thing itself is an event of indescribable moment to the world and to christianity. It forms a new era in the history of man. To have even thought of it, much more actually to have effected it, is the peculiar, I had almost said, the angelic glory of our age.] But it is not more transcendently surprizing in itself, than in the circumstance, that all the civilized christian nations of the world (with the exception perhaps of Spain and Portugal) that had been engaged in it for ages apparently without concern and without compunction, should, almost at the same moment, have consented to its extirpation. But such the fact has been. It requires the hardihood of infidelity itself, to collect in one crowded group all the scenes that within a few years have been witnessed, and all the occurrences that have been realized, and not believe that some glorious day of the Lord, some transporting epoch for heretofore miserable man, is near at hand. Such a belief is not the vague conjecture of uncertainty, or the fond fiction of visionary enthusiasm, but the solid and substantial deduction of reason from a vast body of illustrious and established facts. Christians are now accomplishing with ease a

multitude of things, which half a century ago were probably deemed so utterly impracticable, that the soundness of his brain would have been suspected, who should have even hinted at the possibility of their accomplishment. But now, we have little more to do than *will* a thing that is for the good of Zion and of man, and it is effected. Ten thousand hearts are ready to carry the matter to the throne of grace—ten thousand hands are opened to carry it into execution—from ten thousand purses leaps the silver and the gold that must aid and forward its accomplishment. In every christian nation, the church and the state, while less linked than heretofore in unhallowed and oppressive union, yet lend their mutual aid in matters extremely advantageous to them both. Legislation in christian countries has so far improved, as to consult and to advance more than ever the moral good of man, while it is gradually breaking the chains which formerly it forged to bind and fetter his conscience.

In discerning the signs of the times, it is farther to be observed, that the humble christian should not be discouraged by a few that are unpropitious, while the great body of them wear a favourable aspect. God is accustomed to try the faith and patience of his people with a few untoward events, while in the main the interests that lie near their hearts have vastly the preponderance. The re-establishment in some countries of Europe of that system from which Luther began and subsequent Reformers continued to free the christian world, and which seemed rapidly on the decline, is an event at first sight of this inauspicious character, especially the re-erection of the horrid tribunal of the Inquisition and the revival of the order of Jesuits* in that country in which it had but recently been overturned. But even these are but as "the small dust upon the balance," in comparison of those weighty matters in opposition to them, which have passed under our review. And if the spirit of Protestantism has so far gained ground as to form Bible Societies among those who bear the papal name, this spirit may increase; and if it does, if the spirit of the gospel prevails among men, we need not take the trouble of enquiring by what name they are called. "The words that I speak unto you," says Jesus, "they are spirit and they are life."

It is time to hasten to an improvement of all that has been said.

Are we discerning and improving the signs of our times? Union among the genuine followers of the lamb is one of them. Entering fully into the spirit of this amiable, virtue, are we discovering, loving, commending and imitating the image of Jesus wherever it appears? Attached to pure and undefiled christianity itself more than to any specific external form which it may assume, do we love the sincere, upright, conscientious, though perhaps in some minor particulars, mistaken follower of the Lamb of another, far more than the mere nominal christian of our party, who is more distinguished for his party spirit, than for his christian qualities and virtues? Do we rejoice in the gradual decrease, and are we anticipat-

* The Emperor of Austria has prohibited the establishment of the order in at least some of his dominions.

ing with pleasure the entire extinction of the little contracted narrow spirit of bigotry, which, whatever apology may have been admissible in its behalf in the darkness of the sixteenth century, admits of no excuse in the enlightened and liberal period of the nineteenth? Anxious to know and do the whole will of God, as far as we can ascertain it ourselves, are we nevertheless sensible, that it is possible for our neighbour in many points to take a different view of things from ourselves, and yet be equally honest, conscientious, exemplary and acceptable? To imbibe this candid, charitable spirit, in opposition to the narrow and illiberal feelings which were once but too common among christians, is to discern aright and to improve one sign of the present times.

Again, while societies unknown before are getting into existence and successful operation, and those of earlier origin and longer standing are multiplying, have we caught or are we catching the spirit for doing good in various shapes, which like a flame, is spreading from one part of Christendom to another? Then may we hope that a blaze of usefulness and of glory shall be kindled, wherever a church of Christ is found, or a Disciple of the Redeemer exists, to bear up the character or copy the pattern of that master, who "went about doing good." While those in our land and in other regions, that are destitute of the written and of the preached word, and desirous of possessing both, are crying out to us, "give us bibles and we will prize them, give us ministers and we will attend to and profit by their labours," are we disposed to hear their cry, to compassionate their case, to stretch out our hands for their relief? The providence of God, by the late copious effusion of the Spirit's influence on the literary seminaries in our land, has done more in one or two years to furnish the church with pastors after his own heart, than in the ordinary course of things could have been expected probably in half a century. It is to be expected as a thing of course, and it is indeed a thing of fact, that many of the subjects of this influence, who otherwise would have followed some lucrative profession, to which the love of gain or of honor would have prompted them, do now desire no greater honor than to "win souls to Christ," no higher recompense than to have those as their joy and crown, at last, to whom they may be useful in the work of the ministry. Are we then prepared to do our part in removing every obstacle out of the way of this design, that may arise from the scantiness of pecuniary means? Are we ready to co-operate with others of our countrymen and fellow-christians by establishing auxiliary institutions of the same nature with those which they have formed for this laudable and interesting object? So favoura-

* Sixteen Students of Divinity are supported at the Theological Seminary in Princeton from funds raised by benevolent Societies. But notwithstanding all that has been done by these associations, it is put on record, that through the past year several young men of promising talents and piety were prevented from entering the seminary for want of support. The complaint formerly was, of the smallness of the number of those who were inclined to undertake this work. The greater complaint now is, of the deficiency of means for properly qualifying those, who have the disposition to engage in it.

ble a period for the church has never occurred before within the memory of any of us, and if it be misimproved, may never occur again in our day.

Can we do nothing towards arresting the progress of flagrant vice, or curbing the growth of rank licentiousness? Is there not sufficient morality among us to withstand and to restrain some of the most flagrant breaches of public morals that are but too discernible in every large community? Have not those who bear rule in civil matters both principle and fortitude enough to bear down vice, how bold soever a front it wear—to prop up virtue however timid it may seem? And is there not enough of sterling worth in the community to fortify and to embolden him who is armed with power to suppress disorder and to remove nuisances? Can we do nothing, or rather can we not do much, to shew how clearly we discern, and how fully we appreciate the signs of the times, in relation to the moral and religious improvement of the world?

Are revivals of religion, great, extensive, and numerous, another sign of the times? and do we not discern it, do we not approve it, do we not long to have ourselves some tokens of the presence and power, the love and grace of the church's head? Then will we be engaged in fervent prayer to him, with whom is "the residue of the spirit," that he would "pour us out such a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it." Again, if the christian world are engaged in a delightful concert of prayer, are we not ready to join the holy, happy phalanx, and on the appointed evening to send up our prayer as incense in conjunction with millions, who, though separated by seas and mountains and a thousand intervening natural objects—separated too by names and modes and forms, do nevertheless meet in concord at the mercy-seat. And if the presence of Jesus and his blessing be promised whenever "two or three are met together in his name," how sure and precious and abundant must that blessing be, which is the result of the joint entreaties of many tens of thousands. And if such harmony be witnessed on earth, where so many jarring notes and discordant voices are always found, what must be the symphony of heaven, where all think alike, all feel alike, and all adore alike.

[The millennial day of the church on earth, for the arrival which Divine Providence seems to be preparing the way by the scenes we have been reviewing, will itself be but preparatory to that eternal day in the heavens, which shall not be succeeded by any night there." In our anxieties for the glory, and in our prayers and efforts for prosperity, of Jerusalem below, let us never be unmindful of, but ever be preparing for, that eternal kingdom, which it is the Father's good pleasure to bestow on all who love the Son. There we shall survey together with renewed interest all the scenes of time through which we passed. And when reviewing the feeble but honest efforts we have made, in doing good and being useful in our day and generation, we shall take no merit to ourselves, but feel constrained to unite in an anthem of everlasting praise to God our Creator and to Jesus our Redeemer.

F I N I S.