

**THE MILLENNIUM: AN ESSAY
READ TO THE
GENERAL CONVENTION OF
NEW HAMPSHIRE, JUNE, 1853**

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The Millennium: An Essay Read to the General Convention of New Hampshire, June, 1853 by
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NEW-HAMPSHIRE,

JUNE, 1853.

BY NATHAN LORD,
PRESIDENT OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE.



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ESSAY.

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THE CONVENTION have assigned to me, as a theme for this essay, "The modern theory of Millenarianism." I do not understand them to expect a discussion of this subject, by way of defence, or apology, which would require a volume: but a statement, which may be brought within the limits proper to one of the many exercises of this occasion.

I honor the courtesy and liberality of my brethren. It is due to them, and to myself, not to decline their generous appointment. I will endeavor not to interfere with their other engagements, nor obtrude greatly upon their patience, nor make severe demands upon their charity.

I am reminded, that when Paul preached to the Athenians concerning Jesus and the Resurrection, he was encountered by certain philosophers of the Epicureans and Stoics. "And they took him, and brought him to Areopagus, saying, May we know what this doctrine whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean."

There is no resemblance between the parties brought together, then and now, in respect to character, or position. But the subject of inquiry and discourse is the same; namely, Jesus and the Resurrection. The resurrection was the prophetic evidence of the Messiahship of Christ, in connection with his first appearing. It is

also the prophetic evidence of the same office, but more exalted, in connexion with his second appearing. But, in the one case, it was his personal resurrection. In the other, it is the resurrection of his disciples ; for, when he comes again, he will bring his saints with him. The resurrection of the saints is the prophetic proof of the Messianic kingdom consummated and manifested in a state of millennial glory, as the personal resurrection of Christ was the prophetic proof the same kingdom set up spiritually in believing hearts. The resurrection, in these different respects, is a matter of prophetic theology equally in the Jewish age, and the present Christian age ; and it is the pivot on which the evidence of two successive ages or dispensations of Christianity, is made to turn. In the Jewish age it had been lost sight of, under the rubbish of rabbinical traditions, and philosophical speculations. When it occurred, historically, it was not believed at Jerusalem ; and it seemed incredible at Athens. For similar reasons, it is equally lost sight of in the present Christian age. Its historical occurrence, in the present state of opinion on the subject, would be likely to produce even a more astounding sensation among the wise men of our times, than Christ's personal resurrection created among the doctors in the temple, and the philosophers in the Areopagus. Whoever attempts now to bring it out to view, beforehand, from the Scripture, in its prophetical relations, seems to the generality, to propound as great a novelty as Paul when he preached to the men of Athens. Society has now a different philosophy, as it had then ; and probably nothing will, very extensively, dissipate its illusions, but " The Sign of the Son of man," and ' the opening of the graves.'

But not less, on that account, was the reality then ; and not less, on the same account, will it be again. The

prophecy which was fulfilled, literally, two thousand years ago, is not more literally or significantly expressed in Scripture, than that which remains to be fulfilled, and for whose fulfilment the Christians are emphatically taught to be always looking. The doctrine of the resurrection, at Christ's second appearing, to introduce a millennial age of glory, is not a new and strange thing invented, but an old thing revived. It was preached to Abraham, when he received Isaac, in a figure, from the dead. It stands in all Scripture, and in the early formulas and traditions of the Christian church. It has been strange, at any time, only as men, for natural, philosophic reasons, or without reason, and without thought, have, in different periods, preferred not to contemplate this supernatural evidence of the Messianic reign; — first, the reign of grace, in the church militant; and, secondly, the reign of glory in the church triumphant.

Accordingly, I premise, that Millenarianism, of which Jesus and the Resurrection are the central figure, is not what the phraseology in which The Convention describe my subject, indicates, — a theory, but a doctrine. It is not more a theory than the Trinity, or the incarnation of Christ, or his atonement, or regeneration, or any other supernatural and distinctive element of the Revelations; but is itself a doctrine. That is, it is a formal and authoritative declaration of God concerning his way of governing the world by Jesus Christ. It is infinitely important, on that account; not as a matter of curiosity, but of faith, in distinction from the theories and speculations by which so many of the churches, and society in general, in our modern period, have been turned away, in this respect, from the simplicity of Scripture.

I know no theory of Millenarianism, properly so called; and I know no modern, in distinction from an-

cient Millenarianism. This, like other doctrines of Scripture, for a long time held by the primitive Christians, was corrupted, at length, by rationalistic and fanciful interpreters, led by Origen and other speculative theologians of the schools. Through the middle ages it was mostly covered up by scholastic traditions, allegorical commentaries, and the errors of Romanism in general. Occasionally, excited men, who caught, amidst the surrounding darkness, some glimpses of the primitive truth, attempted to revive it. But they could not reproduce it in its simplicity. The age was too dark. Providence was not ready for them. They brought out only obscure resemblances of it, mere caricatures, which disgusted all considerate persons, and served only to perpetuate the popular delusions. These extravagancies are reported in all the histories down to the Reformation.

The same has been true, to a great extent, of the latter half of the protestant period. The reformers, in general, returned, in this respect, as in others, to the primitive belief. Some of their ablest writers gave it their unequivocal testimony and support. But they were pressed by subjects of more immediate concernment to church and state, and could not, conveniently, elaborate this, which, as they foresaw and testified, would belong more intimately to a future, and, as some affirmed, our present period. It was suffered to fall off again, for the most part, into the hands of the speculative and curious, who have used it rather as a theme for the exercise of a romantic ingenuity, or for giving currency and effect to popular delusions. Till of late, there has been but little scientific inquiry into those laws of prophetic interpretation, by which alone the meaning of Scripture, and the orthodoxy of the primitive age, in this respect, could be re-established. The consequence has been, a deluge of

extravagant and pernicious millennial literature, from Burnet and Whiston all round to Whitby, and his modern imitators, and the school of Miller, among the interpreters; and, among the revealers, from Swedenborg to Ann Lée, and the Latter-Day-Saints of Utah. The protestant conceits have as far exceeded the flights of mediæval novelists, as mental activity and freedom of inquiry have been greater since the Reformation.

But Millenarianism, to a careful and conscientious student, who affects no intuitional knowledge of the Divine counsels, and submits not to human authority in matters of faith, is perfectly distinguishable from these speculative curiosities. It is as susceptible of scientific interpretation from Scripture, in its order, as any of the truths that orthodox Christians have accepted since the days of the Apostles. It is no more exceptionable, on account of the misrepresentations and abuses of it by foolish men, than the Trinity, or atonement, or a future state in general. Like those it has its own unique, intelligible, and infinitely important character, and admits of being reduced, as satisfactorily, if not as easily, to Scriptural formulas. It belongs to the same system of revealed facts, which cannot be consistently and adequately understood without it. It is part and parcel of the regular orthodox theology which Christ and his Apostles taught, which was measurably revived by Luther, Calvin, and the Divines at Westminster, and subsists the same forever. The modern churches have lost sight of it, only because they have lost sight, and so far as they have lost sight of that same old theology, and have admitted, consciously or inadvertently, Gnostic, Pelagian, and other heretical philosophies, into their religious creeds. If we could restore the old theology, in general, from these admixtures of speculation, and ‘opposi-

tions of false science,' Millenarianism would necessarily be restored with it; for it is an integral and necessary part of it. There could not be a revival of the primitive theology without it. It is as really a part of the primitive faith, as the head, or hands, or feet, are parts of a man; or as a governor is part of the State; so that, without it, the man is not a man, but a *lusus natura*; and the State is not a State, but a jumble of discordant factions. My good brethren must pardon me for saying this; for I think it susceptible of demonstration. And it is as consequential as it is true; and therefore ought to be said. I pray them to pardon me: it is they who are following after 'modern theories,' and not the Millenarians. I say it in charity, for I have been as they are; and I would to God that they were, in this respect, as I am, 'except the bonds' which all men necessarily suffer who feel themselves obliged to conflict with inveterate prejudices of society.

But, however; I am to show what Millenarianism is: not what it is not; — not any of the caricatures which have been hung up in some of the theological reviews, and other periodicals, and in some sermons, and in Mr. Brown's famous book, by men who thought before they studied, and wrote before they thought. I do not discuss them. They have been handled hardly enough already, by one of our own writers, whose hand is *very* hard, and who wears no gloves.* I am to show simply what Millenarianism is. And the question 'what it is,' should be asked, only, as the Convention have asked it, of a Millenarian; — just as if one would know the doctrine of the Trinity, he should not consult Dr. Channing or Dr. Ware, but Professors Woods and Stuart; or election, not John Wesley, but John Calvin; not Martin

* Theological and Literary Journal.