

**THE PRESENT STATE OF
CHRISTENDOM IN ITS
RELATION TO THE SECOND
COMING OF THE LORD**

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AUGUSTUS CLISSOLD

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"CUSTOS, QUID DE NOCTE?"—*Esaias xx. 17.*

BY THE
REV. AUGUSTUS CLISSOLD, M.A.



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P R E F A C E.

IN order to trace faithfully the relation of the present state of Christendom to the *Second Coming of the Lord*, it is necessary to form just ideas both of the Catholic Church as it now is, and of the nature of the *Second Coming*. With regard to the Church, we have exemplified its state from out of its modern literature, which is distinguished by this peculiarity, that there is a general admission that some great crisis in Christendom has now arrived, and that it may have a near relation of some kind or other to the Second Advent; though what that relation is, it is left to time only to disclose. The reason is, that the true nature of the Second Advent is, in itself, regarded as an obscure subject.

“ St. Paul has foretold that in the last days shall come perilous times—that in the last times some shall depart from the faith. Those days seem now to be upon us; and individuals perhaps may fall.”

Although this is not an unfrequent observation; yet, as the *Last Days* are those which immediately precede the Coming of the Son of Man, our object has been to shew that they involve the destinies not of individuals only, but of the whole Church and Dispensation. The principles at stake in the present day affect not only the welfare of particular parties in the Church, such as liberal Catholics on one side and Ultramontanes on the other; they involve the whole question of Catholic Unity, and even the very exist-

ence of the present Catholic Church—as indeed is openly acknowledged on all sides.

Our aim, however, has been not only to derive from the literature of the day some account of the present crisis in Christendom; but also to throw some light upon the subject by an explanation of the real nature of the *Second Coming*—an explanation, however, which is not new; since it has long been anticipated in Patristic writings from the earliest ages of the Church; although to the general reader it may appear to be new, from the circumstance of its having for generations fallen into oblivion. That, in the end, it is that explanation which in all reflecting minds will gain the ascendancy, I cannot doubt.

As to the literature referred to in the ensuing remarks, although it will probably form only a small portion of what will ultimately be published upon the subject, yet it contains all the great questions which are now at issue, and which bear upon the subject of the Last Days; so that any future publications will be only fuller developments of the same general argument.

Surely it may be well to sing not only with the spirit, but with the understanding also, the solemn and startling words of the hymn introduced so generally in modern times into Cathedrals and other places of worship, on Advent Sundays:

“ Sleepers awake : a Voice is calling :
It is the Watchman on the walls,
Oh ! city of Jerusalem !
Arise, and take your lamps ;
For Lo ! the Bridegroom comes !
Hallelujah ! Awake ! His kingdom is at hand :
Go forth to meet your Lord.”



THE
PRESENT STATE OF CHRISTENDOM,

ETC., ETC.

THE duty of the spiritual watchman is to observe the states of the Church and its changes, and to sound a note of warning in the case of coming perils. Either it is his duty to do so now, or else there is no watchman, or else the office of watchman is abolished. Events, we are told, are the interpreters of Prophecy; but events were no such interpreters to the Jews. Is, then, Prophecy rather the interpreter of events? How can it be, when we do not understand the Prophecy? And if we do not understand the Prophecy, how shall we understand the events? There is, in this case, only one way in which we can view them, namely, in their external relation. But the spiritual states of the Church have their primary relation not to earth, but to heaven; to the Divine Government of the world, not merely to the Human Government of nations: they have their place in the history of the Divine Dispensations, as certainly as political events have their place in the political history of nations. God has given us, in His written Word, a history of

these Dispensations. All events that are to take place in the Church are there foreshadowed by our Lord Himself; but He especially says, "Whoso readeth, let him understand." He must understand the prophecy he reads in order to understand the events he sees; and if he cannot understand the prophecy without being spiritually enlightened, so neither without spiritual illumination will he understand the events which are its fulfilment; and, as far as he is concerned, the events will have only an external significance, and the prophecy no significance whatever.

Now, it is only to events in the spiritual order of things, that is, to states of the affections and thoughts, that we here propose to call attention. For, as in the moral history of a man's mind, his moral states are the events which constitute his history, so the spiritual states of a Church are the events which are proper to the spiritual history of the Church. This we see in the case of the Seven Churches of Asia: but events of this character are the subjects of spiritual discernment only; and on whose spiritual discernment are we to rely? The Seven Churches of Asia had each its own spiritual discernment. Judging of herself by herself, that is, by her own spiritual discernment only, the Church of Laodicea said of herself, "I am rich, and in need of nothing." But is a Church to be the sole or supreme arbiter of her own states, or of those of other Churches? Ephesus was not asked what she thought of herself, or of Smyrna; nor was Pergamos asked what she thought of herself, or of Thyatira. The true character of all Churches is revealed only in their relation to the Coming of the Son of Man; and it is only in relation to this Coming, and by a right understanding of its nature, that the character which any Church gives of herself is to be judged.

This principle it is the more important to remember,

because we read, in the present day, that—"A popular* Catholicism and fabulous representation of the Church has been gradually built up, which surrounds her past history with an idea halo, and conceals by sophistries and virtual lies whatever is difficult, or inconvenient, or evil; whatever, in short, is offensive to pious ears."

The fabulous representation here alluded to, is the one arising out of such theories as the following:—"The Church in the beginning knew the whole revelation of God, and knows it in every age, with a perception that is never obscured, and a consciousness which is never suspended."

Now, it is at the Second Coming of the Lord that theories of this kind are put to the test; and nothing but this Second Coming can effectually do so, unless we have ears to hear only the testimony which the Church bears concerning herself. What this testimony is we propose to consider more at large, in order that we may afterwards compare it with the state of the Church at the Coming of the Son of Man.

In pursuing† this course, then, we may first observe, that, in his *Theological Prelections*, Perrone says, that the Church is endowed with two principal prerogatives, namely, with *Infallibility* in teaching, and with public *Authority* and *Jurisdiction*; in virtue of which she is invested with "a coercive power which shall compel all firmly to believe and make profession of her doctrines."

Archbishop Manning says:—"It‡ is of faith that the Church alone can declare the contents and the limits of Revelation, and can alone determine the extent of its own Infallibility."

* *Letters of Quirinus*, p. 442.

† Tom. ii., *De Sac. Script. Int.*, pars. ii., cap. iii., et seq., p. 1109.

‡ *Privilegium Petri*, Essay iii., p. 129. Also p. 123.