

## THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

[FOR THE RECORD.]

The nations of the earth are tottering on their foundations. The signs of the times are momentous. We live in times of change; and there are anxious watchers who look with intensest anxiety for every indication which marks the shifting horizon of the political hemisphere. But of the multitude who thus intently watch the demands of the people, the deliberations of statesmen, the discussions of equities, and the councils of kings, how few can truly be said to discover the signs of the times. They are keenly alive to the interests of commerce and trade, and property. In all their commercial bearings they can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but in their bearings upon THE ARK OF GOD, they do not discern the signs of the times. That the people of God may be aroused, and made more tremulously alive to the interest of Christ's cause, we ask the prayerful attention of our readers to the following remarks.

**I. One of the most alarming signs of our times is the low state of religion.**

We can but glance at the more obvious views of this great subject. Look at the nations on the continent of Europe, where the Reformation once prevailed, and from whence it was hoped that the breath of the Spirit of the Living God had for ever swept away the dense clouds of Papal superstition. What a dismal dreary night of superstition and rationalism has settled down upon the lands of Luther and of Calvin! The few faithful ones who remain are prophesying in sackcloth and ashes, and some of them amid bonds and imprisonment. Even in Britain, the bulwark of Protestantism, how much there is of Puseyism, and rationalism, and Arianism, and infidelity. Secularity pollutes the churches. Conformity to the world dishonors the Christian profession. The principles of a worldly policy supersede the counsels and the claims of God. On the whole theatre of action, man with his rights, his liberties and his progress is everything, and God is disregarded. These views are regarded as illiberal and enthusiastic. We would they were less true. It appals the thoughtful mind to contemplate the upshot of this state of things, when the three-score years of life shall give place to eternity. The day of God is at hand, and where are the signs of preparation for its advent?

Our days have fallen in a cold freezing night-time of religion. There is a sad lack of warmth, and whole-heartedness, and single-mindedness. There is less of avowed infidelity than at some former periods, but never was there more of negative infidelity, of Sadducean indifference, and of Sardonian coldness. Even God's people seem to breathe in the frozen zone of piety. And then, of the tens of thousands who throng our cities, or are scattered through our villages and hamlets, how few there are who avouch the Lord Jehovah to be their Sovereign God, and Jesus Christ to be their Saviour and their King. Look in upon their families, how few acknowledge God there, and bend their knees around the hearth-stone! How few ever profess to live Godly lives in Christ Jesus! Do not a large majority of nominal Christians encase at everything like serious religion as fanaticism and Methodism? Do not they practically seek to strip this life of its connection with a mightier state of existence, and to reduce the whole duty of man to a round of employments and recreations, which leaves God and eternity out of sight altogether?

But while there has been a great falling away from the faith, there are still individual and local revivals of religion, which testify that God hath not forgotten to be gracious. While the Church has well nigh quenched the Spirit, God is nevertheless carrying out his own work of gathering a people together to himself; and he is warning those who are his, to linger no longer about the threshold, but "to draw near with true hearts and

with the full assurance of faith, into the holiest of all."

**II. The progress of despotism is another sign of the present time.**

A few years ago every anxious eye, and every generous heart was turned to Europe; and as the panorama of falling dynasties and rising constitutions passed before our eyes, many fondly imagined that a millennium of civil and religious liberty had come at length. Four years are gone, and where is it? It hath passed away just like a vision of the night. Who would have ventured to anticipate that so bright a morning would so soon have been darkened by such a dismal mist as now rests upon the nations of Europe? Who would have ventured to foretell, that in France men would have been persecuted, imprisoned and banished for preaching the Gospel, and distributing tracts and Bibles, under the pretence, that they were revolutionists! and that in Florence, men, ay, and a tender woman, would have been condemned to an infamous punishment in the galleys for reading God's Word. In Austria, too, there is the same barbarous persecution. The princes of Europe have entered into an alliance with Popery, the undisguised aim of which is to trample liberty, both civil and religious, under the iron heel of despotism. For the present all is peace; but it is a fearful stillness. Perhaps while I now write, and long before this will meet the eyes of my readers, that lowering thunder-cloud which has so long hung over Europe, may have burst in all its fury. Louis Napoleon has entered upon a course in imitation of the meteor-like career of his great uncle, and where all this may end, is known to God only. The liberties of France are already destroyed, Europe's peace is threatened, and men's hearts are failing for fear of what is to come next.

There is but one bright spot in Europe, on which the weary eye can rest, and that is Britain, the land of Sabbaths and of Bibles. May she, through the grace of God, be spared, and enabled to maintain her independence. But while she remains an asylum for the oppressed, and holds out her example to the nations of Europe, who can for a moment doubt that she will be the object both of hatred and of fear, to those who seek the total extinction of liberty. It becomes the Church of God, in this matter, to distinguish the signs of the times; and should the day of England's invasion ever arrive, every believer should stand in readiness to press close around the ark of the covenant. Clothed with the irresistible might of meekness, it will become the Christian to stand fast in the evil day, and to be the will of God, he should be ready to mingle his blood with that of patriots and of saints.

**III. From the signs of the times in connection with the sure word of prophecy, we believe that a brief time of trouble is at hand, such as never has been and never will be again.**

The limits of this article will not admit of any attempt to lay before the reader an account of the argument from the chronological prophecies by which the conclusion has been arrived at; nor is it necessary: it is enough to state the conclusion itself to which all the students of prophecy have been brought viz.:—"That we are upon the very eve of the millennium—that while the day and the hour is uncertain, there are unmistakable evidences of its near approach. But it is distinctly foretold that before the dawn of that blessed day, there is to be a time of fearful trial to the church, and of awful vengeance upon the Gentile nations. The time has already come when we hear of wars and rumours of wars; already hath nation risen up against nation; already there have been famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places. All these are but "the beginning of sorrows." Prophecies are now in the course of fulfilment. Many false prophets have arisen and are deceiving many. In view of the impostures and the pretended signs and miracles of the present day, and in view of the multitudes who are drawn away by such follies, and who with all

earnestness embrace and propagate them, we can hardly fail of arriving at the conclusion that the prophecy has begun to be fulfilled which declares that "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Alas! how true it is, that "iniquity abounds, and the love of many is waxing cold." In connection with these prophecies there is one of a different character which is also being brought to pass in a very remarkable manner, even now "the gospel of the kingdom is being preached unto all nations for a witness." From these accumulating evidences we know that the end is at hand. What is to accompany and follow these events? We are distinctly told by our Saviour, that then there shall be, "great tribulation such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time; no, nor ever shall be." Who knoweth how soon the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet may be set up? See Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii.

Yes, reader, a time of fiery trial is at hand. It becomes you to examine the foundation of your hope, for it will soon be proved and tried as by fire. We are on the eve of a stormy period,—a period which will try every man's work of what sort it is. The chaff on the threshing floor of Zion is to be winnowed out, and amid the omens of coming storm, and the gatherings of a dark and cloudy day, we affectionately lift up the warning voice and cry, "Flee ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope."

**IV. Amid all that is ominous in the signs of the times, we have Jehovah's assurance of the safety of the Ark, and a glorious morning of universal blessings which is soon to dawn.**

Here the Saviour's gracious invitation to his church in such a day as this. "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." The ark of the covenant is safe. Like Noah's ark it will ride securely on the top of the waters; it cannot be overwhelmed. Satan's attacks are all the more fierce, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. But he will not prevail. He that is for us is greater than he that is against us. Hold fast therefore the beginning of your confidence firm unto the end. Though the man of sin, that Son of perdition, climb up to the highest pinnacle of his ascendancy, still the ark is safe, and amid perils and persecution she shall not die but live, and the very hour of her extremity will be God's opportunity.

There is truth in the old adage, that "the darkest hour is nearest the dawn." When the calamities have reached their height, "then cometh the end." And how glorious the end! What a bright prospect dawns on God's elect people, when the Son of Man shall appear in his kingdom, and the church of Christ shall shine forth as the stars for ever, and the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God's glory.

"Break sacred morning through the sky,  
Bring that delightful dreadful day,  
Cut short the hours, Dear Lord, and come,  
Thy lingering wheels how long they stay."

We conclude with the following remarks:—

1st. This is time for earnest preparation. A near eternity is a very solemn thing. If it be true that the night of darkness and perplexity is gathering around us—if a judgment be at the door, say impetuous reader, where will you look—to whom will you go in that emergency? Oh! come to Jesus. Guilty, helpless sinner, come to Him, who saith, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Cast yourself at the foot of the cross. Raise the strong fervent cry of urgent necessity—the cry of a perishing sinner—leave not without peace and a blessing. In Christ you will be like Noah in the ark, or Lot in Zoar—no evil will come nigh you.

2nd. This is a time for faithful witness-bearing.