

and powerful, had ever been converging. This was the event which Abraham had seen afar off, and for which he was glad. Patriarchs and prophets rejoiced in contemplation of it. Jewish Ritualism and Jewish History herein found a deep and sacred import. Take away from history the fact of the incarnation, and it becomes a mass of disorder and a very Babel of confusion: Judaism seems an unmeaning superstition, and the observances of the Gentile world an awful enigma. For if the Saviour had not been born to suffer and to die, what superior wisdom and what much greater and deeper sanctity could we trace in the Jewish Church than in the heathen world? True, they did not stain their hands with human sacrifice, as did their heathen neighbors; still, they *built their altars and slew their sacrifices in vain* if Christ did not appear. How deeply sad and sorrowful does the whole of that history read, if the birth of Jesus be for a moment denied! Ever since the beginning of history, the Church of God had looked forward to this glorious event. Age after age had come and gone, and each successive age rejoiced in the nearer prospect of the appointed time. That a great Deliverer was to be born, was no matter of doubt or question. All the institutions of the Patriarchal and Mosaic economy pointed to the fact. The prophets saw it far down the vista of years, and rejoiced in the prospect of its advent. The Psalmist struck his harp to celebrate the joyous fact. The people bore patiently the burden of their captivity and their oppression, believing, from the heaven-inspired predictions of their prophets, that a Deliverer should come. They were accustomed to hear much of His nativity and His character. They knew that He would spring from the tribe of Judah and from the house of David. Their prophets had pointed out the place where He should be born, and many of the circumstances of His nativity. Further still, the *time* had been predicted, so that the nation was justified in expecting the event when it had really transpired in history. Yet the Jews were not solitary in their expectations of some great personage appearing on the stage of history. The Gentile world had also its expectations. The wise men of whom the Evangelist tells us, were but the representatives of a numerous class who stood waiting on the threshold of history for the appearance of Him who was to come. Such a knowledge of His nature and mission as that possessed by the prophets of old, they had not; yet that they did expect some strange and extraordinary personage, seems abundantly clear. A Latin poet sung, but a few years before the birth of our Lord, of the coming of One who was destined to effect great and glorious changes in human history. He merely expressed a belief that was common among mankind—a belief that seems to have pervaded the world at this period, and grounded, probably, on some dim tradition

borne downwards from an early period of history, and fondly cherished by mankind in every successive age. At His appearance, they expected the righting of human wrongs. Under His wise and just administration, they looked for the growth of human virtue, and the downfall of vice and oppression. Jews and Gentiles alike *expected His coming*, and thus, in point of human *expectation*, He might indeed be called "the desire of all nations."

But, secondly, He was justly called "the desire of all nations," because He alone could fill up the measure of all nations' desires and wants.

At the time of the birth of our Lord, history had arrived at its crisis. Old creeds were no longer powerful to satisfy the scrutiny of the human intellect, or the cravings of the human heart. Old forms were fast fading away. Old superstitions were losing their wonted charms, and proving themselves to be wells without water. This crisis might be compared to that to which the sick man arrives when the fever has reached its height, and when death and life are wavering in the balance. That sick man had long been tossing in restless anguish. He had consulted many physicians—tried many offered remedies, but, instead of recovering, had only become worse and more restless still. He had at length almost lost confidence in all medical skill, and was almost on the brink of despair. Yet still he felt that his malady was not incurable could the right physician come. The ceremonial law was losing its power over the minds of the chosen people. The ten thousand gods of Greece and Rome could not satisfy the wants of their worshipping votaries; both Jew and Gentile felt that something was needed which they did not possess. The sacrificial fire burnt as of old on the altars in Judah, yet still the conscience of the worshipper was ill at ease. The blood of bulls and of goats streamed in crimson torrents, yet they could not take away sin, nor bring peace nor rest. Heathenism still practised its bloody and cruel rites, but all in vain. The first-born was sacrificed for transgression, and the fruit of the body given for the sins of the soul; still, the fruits of transgression remained, and the sins of the soul were unpardoned. Their observances pointed to a knowledge of sin and a feeling of unrest, which those observances could not remove, and, indeed, which could never be removed except through Him who was "the desire of all nations." Endeavor to separate Judaism, with its altars, its priests and its sacrifices, from its connection with the great High Priest of our profession, and the sacrifice which He offered once for all, and it sinks down to a mass of meaningless observances. All their ordinances pointed to the one great event of history—a coming Redeemer; and this event gave them their deep and solemn meaning and use. And what was heathenism but a groping in the dark—