

In every century since the commencement of the Christian era there has been a strong expectation of the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the existing order of things. This expectation has fluctuated in strength and weakness at different periods of history. In the first century it was the prevailing belief of Christians, especially up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, for our Lord's words, that the then existing generation should see the terrible things he had predicted come to pass, were referred to the end of all things, and the fact that a prophecy may have two fulfilments had not then been recognized. The Apostles themselves taught and believed that the second advent might be at hand in their own days.—Although some expressions of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Thessalonians seem to show that certain events must previously occur, it is not clear that he thought those events would exceed the duration of that generation.

In subsequent centuries, such as the eleventh and the sixteenth, these expectations were particularly strong, and affected the convictions and the lives of many earnest Christians.—Never, however, have these opinions taken such hold of men as in this day. A system of interpretation has been arbitrarily and ingeniously, but inconsistently built up, founded, as it is thought, on history, on the presumption of the past fulfilment of many prophecies, and on the assumption of the approaching fulfilment of others. Great ingenuity has been displayed in