THE GREAT CONSUMMATION.

BY THE EDITOR.

1 Thes. 4: 15-18.

I. The Central Event. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout."

OBSERVE the emphatic expression — "The Lord himself" — Christ will not send for his people; he will come for them. There are some services so sacred that they cannot be delegated to other hands. Such is this last and wonderful transaction of bringing home the saints of God. No angel is commissioned to execute this service; least of all is grim and ghastly death entrusted with the honor of conducting the disciples home to their heavenly mansions." "I go to prepare a place for you," said the Saviour, "and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself." "I will come — not I will send Gabriel who stands in the presence of God waiting to speed an errand of love; or I will send Elijah the prophet, who is commissioned to prepare the way of the Lord among the children of Israel. No! I will come. It was an exquisitely beautiful expression of childlike faith to which a dying Scotch girl gave utterance when to soothe her fears they said: "Don't be afraid Mary, the Lord will send his angels to bring you home." "I dinna ken the angels," she replied, "I am not acquainted with the angels, but I am acquainted with Jesus and I wish he would come for me." A truly evangelical desire; and one which was answered long before it was expressed. "I will come and receive you unto myself." "The Lord himself shall descend."

But does it not read "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout — with the voice of the archangel." But we believe that Jesus Christ is the archangel. That he is the prince and leader of the angel host as truly as he is the "prince of the kings of the earth." The voice of the angel is therefore the voice of our Beloved, the shepherd-call of our Immanuel, sounding not in tones of terror and vengeance, but in accents of tenderest affection. "Come, my people, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast. For behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities." And at the sound of his voice his flock will instantly be gathered to him from every fold and every land throughout the world; and there in some quiet retreat, in some sheltered paradise, they shall gaze upon his face and hear his voice, saying: "Eat, Oh friends, drink; yea, drink abundantly oh beloved, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and the bride hath made herself ready."

The personal coming of our Lord Jesus Christ — we desire that this really be fixed distinctly in the minds. The tendency of our age is to spiritualize and attenuate the great facts of redemption. "Oh, yes, people say "of course the Lord is coming — he is coming all the time, in the march of civilization, in the discoveries of science and in the movements of divine providence." But think we that this is all, that is meant by the words of Scripture: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven." The astronomer tells us about the stars, and they tell us also about the nebulae which is a kind of star-dust or flaky material of unformed worlds. Is the coming of Christ to be resolved into the nebulae of general providence, and social reform? Nay! He speaks from heaven, saying, "I am the bright and morning star," and "behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be." If there was a real Christ, who walked the shores of Galilee nineteen hundred years ago, with form and features like our own,—a brother man, with tender sympathy and a helping hand for every sorrowing and suffering human being, then it is certain that a real Christ will come back to earth. For his last word to his watching disciples, when he ascended up and a cloud received him out of their sight was: "This same Jesus, whom ye have seen go into heaven shall come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

II. The accompanying events of the Lord's second coming.

1. The resurrection of the dead saints. "And
the dead in Christ shall rise first.” Put a pin
through this statement that shall fix the resurrec-
tion immovably and unchangeably in its true
position, at the advent of our Lord. It is a doc-
trine of the new theology which has gained very
wide acceptance—that every man has his resur-
rection body at death. But as Prof. Van Oos-
terzel admirably says, “The resurrection is not
the work of an age but of a moment; not a grad-
ual process but an instantaneous act. ‘In a mo-
ment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last
trump’ is the language of Scripture concerning
it. It is not then identical with continued exis-
tence in the unseen world; and they who claim
for each individual a separate resurrection im-
immediately after death find no countenance for
their opinion in the language of inspiration.
The resurrection of the dead and the coming of
Christ are in Paul’s mind inseparably connected.
He sees at one and the same moment the
clouds of heaven unfold upon which the judge
descends and the graves of earth open from
which the dead arise.”

And not only this. Just as literal as Christ’s
advent is to be, so literal is the Christian’s resur-
rection to be. The same Jesus who was
 crucified on Calvary will descend from heaven
with a shout, saying, “Ye that are in graves
come forth,” and the same persons who were
laid in their graves will rise up to meet him with
a shout, saying, “Oh, death, where is thy sting.
Oh, grave, where is thy victory.” All this is
wonderful, and to human reason utterly incredi-
ble. We remember that when Paul preached
the resurrection of the dead at Athens some
mocked and others said: “We will hear thee again
of this matter.” It is exactly so in modern Ath-
ens with only the difference that our wise and
learned men mock at the doctrine but refuse
to hear further concerning it. What! this body that
has returned to dust and mingled again with
its native earth—this body that was burned to
ashes in the fire and scattered to the four winds,
or eaten of wild beasts, and passed into the con-
stituency of other bodies—Do you tell me
that this, my body, shall be restored again to its
original form? they ask incredulously. We tell
such nothing, but ask them to hear the words of

Jesus upon this point: “Marvel not at this; for
the hour is coming in which all that are in their
graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth” he
says. And again Paul writing to the Philip-
ians, says: “For our citizenship is in heaven,
from whence we look for a Saviour who shall
change (not our vile body) but the body of our
humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto
the body of his glory.” How truly is this the
body of our humiliation! Stained by sin, de-
formed by sickness, maimed by accident, ema-
ciated by wasting disease, and turned to cor-
ruption in the grave! How defiled and disen-
tered, that which was made originally in the
image of God! But as by the wondrous alchemy of nature, the charcoal, dull, black and
lustrous, is turned into the diamond which spar-
kles in the crown of the king: so in an instant,
in the twinkling of an eye, will this dishonored
and corrupted body be transformed into the
likeness of Christ’s glorified body. For it is
written: “This incorruptible must put on in-
corruption, and this mortal must put on immor-
tality! The resurrection of those who are
Christ’s then, is the first transaction connected
with the Lord’s return.

2. The transformation of those who shall be
alive at his coming is the next event connected
with Christ’s second advent. “Behold, I show
you a mystery,” says Paul, “we shall not all
sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

We are wont to say in the language of the
world that “the most certain fact which we can
mention is that everybody must die.” On the
contrary it is as certain as the infallible word of
God that multitudes living at the second advent
of Christ will not taste of death, but will be
taken up alive into heaven. As Enoch in the
patriarchial age and Elijah in the prophetic age
were “translated that they should not see
death.” So will those watchful and waiting
saints who shall be living at Christ’s return
be changed without passing through the grave.
I understand by the expression—“And we
shall be changed” that a transformation will
come over the living which will bring them into
precisely the same condition into which the
resurrection brings the dead. They will be
immortalized. The body which before was mortal, liable to accident and decay and death will instantly be transformed so that it can no more be hurt by death or sickness than a sunbeam can be wounded by a club or cut with a knife. It will be lifted forever beyond the reach of pain or accident or violence or destruction.

And not only so. In this transformation the Christian will be perfectly restored to the likeness of God in which man was originally created. As John states it: "We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." As by a divine and instantaneous photography the believer at the sight of the descending Christ will instantly be changed into his image.

3. The third fact attending the coming of Christ will be the rapture of the church. The resurrection of the dead and the change of the living are both preparatory to this event in which they issue — the taking up of the body of Christ into glory.

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air." Astonishing transaction. We have constantly seen objects fall to the earth by the attraction of terrestrial gravitation; but now marvelous to tell, multitudes will be seen rising to heaven by the attraction of celestial gravitation. The air will be suddenly filled with throngs of human beings — flying as clouds and as doves to their windows. Only they will be caught up, they will not climb up; by the power of a divine rapture, not by the effort of human strength will they ascend.

"Caught up, caught up no wing required
Caught up to him by love inspired
To meet him in the air!
Spurning the earth with upward bound
Nor casting a single glance around
Nor listing a single earcl horn sound
Caught up in the radiant air."

Let us notice a single form of expression as it reads exactly in the text — "Caught up together to meet thy Lord in the air." "Together" — Ah! there is reunion of the dead and of the living. Those who have been separated by centuries of time and those who only a few days ago bade each other farewell will instantly be together. Abraham and Sarah will come forth from the cave of Machpelah and with hand joined in hand will mount heavenward and meet the Lord; and your husband or your wife laid away last month at Mount Auburn will greet you with the old good morning salutation never to be separated again. But this expression to meet the Lord is declared by Alford, the Commentator, to signify "to meet a person and to return with him." The phrase is used only three times in the New Testament and always bears this significance. If we say we do not like to think of leaving this earth forever let us comfort ourselves with these words. As when Gen. Grant made his memorable visit to Boston a company of our most distinguished citizens went out as far as Alston to meet him and escort him to the city; so Christ's most honored servants — the martyrs and apostles from their graves, and the saints and the faithful ones still living on the earth will go forth into the air to meet him and attend him back with worship and acclamation to this earth that once rejected and crucified him. Not that we would say that the home of the saints will be entirely on the earth henceforth. But that it will not be entirely removed and disconnected from the earth seems certain from Scripture. But we must leave this question. What we desire to dwell on now is the reunion of friends at the coming of Christ.

Will Christians know each other in the disembodied state. We presume they will; but we have no revelation on that point and therefore we cannot speak positively. But in the resurrection state ushered in at the coming of Christ how clearly revealed is the recognition. Have we thought what pains Christ took to make this point clear in connection with his own resurrection? He is the first-fruits of those that sleep. Let us study his forty days on earth after he was raised if we would learn what our resurrection is to be. For as the fruit so will be the harvest. Well! Did Christ's friends know him after he rose from the dead? Yes. Did they talk together and walk together as of old? Yes. Did they sit at meat together and partake of
food from the same table? Yes. Well Christ's resurrection is a specimen of ours; and he took infinite pains to show us that it will bring a restoration to the old familiar conditions of life. Death separates friends; resurrection reunites them. In death they are absent from the body and present with the Lord; in resurrection they are at home in the body and at home with the Lord. We do not want to make the glorified life so vague and remote and ethereal that it shall be utterly incomprehensible to us. That is what we often do; but it is what the Bible does not. Let us look at the actual resurrection in the New Testament again, if we would get light on this subject.

Would one like to have a dear brother whom he had buried years ago in yonder cemetery sit down to dinner with him some day? "Ah, yes, we say." Would not my cup run over in anticipation of such a scene? And we remind you that that was exactly what happened in the home at Bethany. Lazarus died and Lazarus was buried and Lazarus was raised up at the call of the Master. And the next thing we read is that a supper was given in Bethany, and Martha served and Lazarus which had been raised from the dead was one of them that sat at meat. How wonderfully homelike this makes the resurrection life! The household reunited. They that went into the grave returned as from a long journey — looking and talking just as they were wont; only immortal now. No more sin, no more sickness — but henceforth forever with the Lord. Oh, blessed word! The scattered flock reunited! But best of all the shephard present evermore to lead that flock and to bring them unto living fountains of water.

"So shall we be ever with the Lord: wherefore comfort one another with these words."

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"There is room in Heaven," said Bunyan, "for body and soul, but not for body, soul and sin." This witness is true; for what saith the Scriptures? They say, "There shall in nowise enter in anything that defileth."—Rev. 21:27. But they say again, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—1 John 1:7.