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Walter H. Koenig
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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New Testament Light on Old Testament "Millennialistic" Prophecies

By WALTER H. KOENIG

Some months ago, it happened that I came to grips with an ardent disciple of Premillennialism. To meet the man's arguments, I was driven to the Bible, as I found very little help outside of it. Especially on one point did I wish clarity: How does the Holy Ghost in the New Testament apply prophetic passages which millennialists interpret literally but which we interpret spiritually? What is the basis of our spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy? My paper is intended to draw out the meaning of Scripture — and it will offer an example of one of the prime rules of exegesis: "Scriptura Sacra est sui ipsius legitimus interpres," and of St. Augustine's well-known dictum: "Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet."

Millennialists are very positive of the ground on which they stand. As is well known, they expect the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies which we hold to have come to pass, in the time of the end, before or during or after the millennium. How would you answer that basic assumption of all millennialists?

First, let us see what Jesus Himself teaches us. Shortly before His ascension He opened the understanding of His disciples to the meaning of the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45). Then verse 46 continues: Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι οὕτως γέγραπται παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἅφρασις ἁμαρτιῶν

εις πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ. (And He said to them: Thus it is written that Christ was to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that there be preached in His name repentance for forgiveness of sin unto all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem). Unless Jesus was misunderstanding or deliberately misinterpreting the Scriptures, the Old Testament after all bears definite witness to the New Testament dispensation of grace unto all nations. Yea, He even specifies that this is to begin at Jerusalem. Bernhard Weiss¹ calls this very aptly "das Messianische Summarium der alttestamentlichen Weissagung." And note that Jesus adds the command: ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες τούτων (you are witnesses of these things). To this Keil² remarks: "Auch von der Verkuendigung, die sie allerdings selbst vollziehen, koennen sie bezeugen, dass dieselbe nach der Weissagung der Schrift erfolge." No, the Apostles were not to be good millennialists. But where do we find the Old Testament foundation for the statement that the beginning of New Testament preaching is to be at Jerusalem? Is. 2:2 ff. may well be one of the passages Jesus could have had in mind, for there it is definitely prophesied: "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." And now let us read the entire passage (Is. 2:2-5): "And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say: Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Surely, Jesus' application of this passage, so often quoted by millennialists (as Blackstone in *Jesus is Coming*, p. 157),³ is highly embar-

¹ H. A. W. Meyer: *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar ueber das N. T.* 8. Auflage. Goettingen, 1892. *In loco*.

² *In loco*.

³ *Jesus is Coming*. By W. E. B. Fleming H. Revell Co., N. Y. Chicago, 1908, 1916.

passing to these worthies, as it places the beginning of millennialistic peace of the last days squarely into the days of the Apostles. To parry this conclusion, the millennialists will have to produce some other passage from the Prophets to which Jesus could have been referring. Even if their search were successful, this would only prove doubly embarrassing to them.

In entire agreement with the above, we have Jesus' answer to the disciples' last question (in Acts 1:6-8): Lord, wilt Thou at this time — i. e., the time of the giving of the Holy Ghost — restore again the Kingdom to Israel? Jesus answers their question in two parts. First, in regard to time, He answers: "Not yours it is to know times and seasons, which the Father set [determined, fixed] in His own power." Note, by using the plural, and that of both words (*χρόνους* and *καιρούς*), the Savior shows He is speaking in general terms of all future times and seasons, without conceding the correctness of their assumption of a special time of earthly glory for Israel. This latter assumption He corrects in the second part of His answer. He introduces His words with the corrective *ἀλλὰ* (but rather), quite contrary to your fond carnal notions of God's kingdom, the Old Testament prophecies of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel mean something entirely different. They require your receiving the Holy Ghost and, with Him, power to "be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria (the correlatives *τε—και* unite these first two members, while the following *και* adds an extension to Jesus' answer) and unto the end of the earth." That was Jesus' program for the setting up of His kingdom, among Jews first (including the mongrel Jews of Samaria) and then also among the Gentiles; not the Judaistic, materialistic dream which still cluttered their minds and still, after Pentecost and all these years of the New Testament dispensation, darkens the minds of millennialists everywhere.

And after only ten days came Pentecost and the Spirit's light. Then what did Peter see? He saw the meaning not only of the Spirit's miracle, but of Joel's prophecy also. Note Acts 2:16: This is what was spoken through the Prophet Joel. Peter, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, clearly interprets the meaning of the Spirit, writing through Joel (3:1-5; A. V.: 2:28-32), as definitely prophesying this very happening at Pentecost. Now let us look a minute at Joel's words: "And it shall

come to pass afterwards (אַחֲרָיִךְ, literally, "after thus," i. e., after what was prophesied in the previous words) that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." After what should this happen? After the Lord would dwell in the midst of His people Israel (v. 27) and they would enjoy the best of crops (v. 21-26) and never be ashamed! This whole picture is understood literally of the millennium by our opponents; Peter's dating of the following clearly places it *before* Pentecost and forces us to understand it spiritually, that is, as pertaining to the spiritual blessings God gave His people through the activity of His Son in their midst. The passage of Joel quoted by Peter ends with these words (v. 32): "And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant, whom the Lord shall call." Then, in the following verses, the return of Israel and the battle of Judah with the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat is placed in those very days (not "afterwards"). This is a favorite millennialistic stamping ground; but if the Spirit spoke truth through Joel and Peter, He is still with this "battle" in the New Testament time of grace ushered in by Pentecost — and all His words must be understood spiritually.

In confirmation of our interpretation of the words of Joel let us note the second time they are quoted in the New Testament, by St. Paul in Rom. 10:13. There the Apostle adduces the words in question to prove that God is rich in His grace to all, whether Jew or Greek, that call (τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους, present participle, who then, as in all this time of grace, call) upon Him. He, too, certainly sees the words of Joel as being fulfilled in his day and not exclusively in the future.

Next let us call James to our witness stand. He gives us light on the prophetic Scriptures at the Council of Jerusalem. His words (Acts 15:13-18) are clear: "Men and brethren, hearken unto me. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the Prophets, as it is written: After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up, that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom

My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." James, therefore, says: God knew what would happen in this our day, and so He had Amos write as he did at the end of his prophecy of the building up again of David's tabernacle through the Gentiles seeking the Lord. Evidently, then, he interpreted the building up of David's fallen tabernacle in Amos 9 as a figurative way of speaking of the building of the Christian Church. And their "possessing the heathen" he interpreted as a figurative way of speaking of their being taken into that Church. And this was not merely James' private interpretation, but the Holy Spirit's. Otherwise he surely could not have written in the letter to the Gentiles (Acts 15:28): "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." Before going on, let us note one single word James uses in particular. In verse 15 he said: "To this agree the words of the Prophets (τούτω συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν). He uses the plural "Prophets" (προφητῶν), thus indicating that not only Amos, but also other Prophets prophesied the very same things. Their similar earthly pictures are to be understood in a figurative sense also. Our millennialist friends should soon see the light!

Next we call the great Apostle Paul. He has much testimony to give and much divine light to shed on our subject. First we would like to ask him a few questions as to who are Jews and Israel, in God's sight. He answers from his Letter to the Romans (2:28-29): "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Of these truly circumcised Jews he states then, in the following verse, that they have a great advantage. — And the chief? No, not the promise of a special millennialist dispensation, but (3:2) "chiefly [πρῶτον, first and foremost] because that unto them were committed [note the aorist of the definite past] the oracles of God." Their chief advantage lay in the past — and in God's revealed Word, entrusted to them, which Word is able to save their souls. Then he also points us to Rom. 9:6-8: "They are not all Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children, but, In Isaak shall thy

seed be called, that is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Believing Jews, then, have the promises of God as their own. But what of the Gentiles, do they also have these promises of Abraham? For an answer to this question, Paul refers us to his Letter to the Galatians (3:26-29), where he speaks to Gentile Christians and tells them: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Already in verse 7 he had said: "Know ye, therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Light-foot has rendered it well (p. 143): "As members of Christ, ye are Abraham's seed, ye claim the inheritance by virtue of a promise, which no law can set aside," and he is certainly justified in stating: "According to the analogy of the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New, the spiritual takes the place of the natural; the Israel after the flesh becomes the Israel after the spirit; the Jewish nation denotes the Christian Church." James Snowden, in his excellent study of millenarianism *The Coming of the Lord: Is it Premillenarian?*⁴ (p. 218), strikes the nail on the head: "Paul, with one stroke of his pen, 'spiritualized' the whole Old Testament economy when he wrote: 'And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise' (Gal. 3:29)."

And in agreement with this principle, Paul writes as he does in many a passage. Take Ephesians 2, which millenarians like to quote for their own ends. In verse 12 he speaks to Gentile Christians (cf. v. 11) and tells them they should remember that before their conversion they were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world; but [he goes on] now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." "Nigh" — we ask — to what? To the commonwealth of Israel, to the covenants of promise, to hope, to God, to all of which they had before been aliens and strangers! The Christian Gentiles, then, are definitely looked upon as of

⁴ McMillan, N. Y. 1919.

the commonwealth of Israel, who can rightfully lay claim to all Old Testament promises given to Israel. And, in the very next verses, Paul actually applies such promises to Gentile as well as to Jewish Christian. "And came and preached peace to you which were far off and to them which were nigh (v. 17)." This is, for the most part, evidently a quotation of Is. 57:19: "Peace, peace to him that is far off and to him that is near." Now, Is. 57:13-21 is typical of passages such as millennialists use. But the peace and prosperity there promised are all spiritual if the interpretation of Paul in Ephesians 2 is correct, and the promises are shared by Jew and Gentile alike. The idea of "*preaching* peace" may well be an echo of Zech. 9:10, especially since Zech. 9:9 is quoted in Matt. 21:5 as having been fulfilled by Christ while on earth. We are certainly on safe Biblical ground if we interpret all such Old Testament prophecies of peace and prosperity spiritually — of spiritual blessings in Christ's Church now.

Another interesting passage is Rom. 15:5-13, which reads according to the Twentieth Century New Testament: "Therefore I bid you always receive each other as friends, just as Christ Himself received us, and so bring honor to God. What I affirm about Christ is that in vindication of God's truthfulness He has become a servant to the Jews, so that He may fulfill the promises made to our ancestors and so that the heathen also may praise God for His mercy, as Scripture says." Then he quotes passages from the various parts of the Old Testament — Moses (Deut.), the Psalms, and the Prophets. The quotation from the Prophet Isaiah is certainly illuminating. V. 12: "There shall be a Scion of the house of Jesse, One who is to arise to rule the heathen; on Him shall the heathen rest their hopes." And immediately he adds the prayer: "May God, the Source of hope, fill you with perfect joy and peace in your faith, so that you may have overflowing hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Now read all of Is. 11, from which the last quotation was taken. There is perhaps no Old Testament passage quoted oftener by millennialists as portraying the peace of the 1,000 years of Jesus' reign on earth. Blackstone in *Jesus is Coming*⁵ uses it again and again. And yet Paul's use of it in Rom. 15 clearly shows that

⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 54, 92, 130, 167, etc.

the Prophet was speaking of the New Testament Church in this passage and that the pictures of peace he uses are to be interpreted figuratively of the peace of God in Christ, which is to fill all Christians of all nations and races also with peace and love for one another.

Another striking passage is Gal. 4:26-28: "But the Jerusalem above is free, who is the mother of us all, for it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear, break into shouts, thou who art not in labor, for many are the children of her who is desolate, more than of her who has a husband.' But you, brethren, like Isaac, of the promise are children." Here, on the one hand, Jerusalem is used figuratively of the Christian Church. "It is a symbol or image representing that spiritual city of which the Christian is even now a denizen" (Light-foot). Cf. Heb. 12:22: Ἱεροσολίμη ἐπουράνιος. Then, too, a passage of Isaiah is quoted, which describes the return of Israel (54:1-8). All this, according to Paul's interpretation, is to be understood figuratively of the Christian Church and in particular of the taking in of the Gentiles into the city of God.

Consider also 2 Cor. 6. At the beginning of the chapter (vv. 1-2) the Apostle quotes Is. 49:8, which prominent millennialists place into the millennium: "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee and give thee for a covenant of the people to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." All this is promised by God in the Old Testament to Israel whom the Lord has chosen. Now see how God, through the Apostle, refers it to His work among the Christians of Corinth. Translating it literally, it would read about like this: "As God's fellow workers, we further appeal to you not to receive His mercy in vain, for He says, In an acceptable time (καιρῷ δεκτῷ) heard I you, and in a day of salvation (ἡμέρᾳ σωτηρίας) helped I you. Behold, now (νῦν) is καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος (the very acceptable time); behold, now (νῦν) ἡμέρα σωτηρίας (the day of salvation)." It is unthinkable to believe that God would base such an earnest exhortation on a passage that He intended as a description of a millennium in a future dispensation. He means the New Testament time of grace in Is. 49, even as He says in 2 Cor. 6. Later in that same chapter (2 Cor. 6:16-18) He ap-

plies other prophetic Scriptures to his Corinthian Christians. We begin at verse 15 and translate: "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? or what part [has] a believer with an unbeliever? or what agreement the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, as God saith [Twentieth Century New Testament: This is what God meant when He said]: 'I will dwell in them, and I will walk in them and be to them God, and they shall be My people.'" Compare with this the translation of the Septuagint of Ezek. 37:26: And My abiding place will be in them, and I will be to them God, and they will be My people. Now look at the whole section in Ezekiel whence these words are lifted (Ezek. 37:21-28). A *textus classicus* for the millennialists — only then God's Word in 2 Cor. 6 would have to be ignored! We keep 2 Cor. 6 as a correct explanation of Ezekiel 37 and regard the latter as a figurative description of the New Testament Christian Church. Later in the chapter the Apostle quotes also Is. 52:11 as applying to the New Testament Church, and that in spite of the picture of Israel restored found in that connection.

Look, too, at Titus 2:14, where not only Ezek. 37:23 is quoted almost verbatim from the Septuagint and referred to Christ's New Testament Church, but where also this Church is designated by the title *λαὸν περιούσιον* (peculiar people), the very title God gives to His Old Testament people in Deut. 14:2 according to the Septuagint version. So we could cite Rom. 9:23-33, where Hosea 2, Is. 10:20-23, and Is. 1:9 are all applied to the New Testament Church of God; also Gal. 3:12, where Hab. 2:4 is quoted. God's Church of this New Testament day is indeed the inheritor of all God's promises to His Old Testament Church. And Paul was certainly not wresting the Scriptures when (Acts 26:22-23) he told Festus and Agrippa that these things, namely: "That Christ should suffer and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles," were "none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come."

But we have one question yet to ask our good friend Paul. What of the end? Is there no special dispensation planned and promised by God for the Jews after this time of the Gentiles? Did not you yourself say something like that in Rom. 11:25-26, 31? And Paul might answer: "Look well at

my words there, that you may be wise not in your own minds only, but wise according to the Word of God. Note exactly what I say: "ὅτι πώρωςις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν (i. e., hardening in part has happened and will continue to happen as far as Israel is concerned) ἀχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἔθνῶν εισέλθῃ (until that future day, definite to God, indefinite to man, when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, that is, until the last of the Gentiles shall have been gathered into God's house). And then what? Paul answers: "I say nothing here of what may or may not happen after this point—I use no τότε or μετὰ τοῦτο to indicate any advance in time. I merely add a οὕτως, which always means *thus*, in this way, after this manner, to show what will in this way be accomplished. In this way—namely, that only a part of Israel is always hardened throughout the time until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in—in this way all Israel, πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ (that is, all who are really Israel according to the previous chapters, especially ch. 9, 6-8, the elect of Israel), shall be saved. Far from preaching a mass conversion of the Jews in the last days, I definitely exclude it. Of course, this dealing of God is a mystery, as I [Paul is still speaking] point out in the next verses, the mystery of God's eternal election, that takes all boasting from all, whether they be Jew or Greek. Some Jews, like some Gentiles, will come in to the very end, as also the prophecy of Isaiah adduced here proves—salvation comes from Zion when sins are forgiven. Therefore [Paul continues], though the bulk of the Jews are enemies of theirs and of the Gospel, they should always remember that God in His faithfulness to the fathers has His beloved elect also among the Jews. Yea, even more than that, they should be active in showing them (the Jews) mercy, so that by their (the Gentile Christians') mercy (τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἐλέει), they (the Jews) also may now obtain mercy (ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ νῦν ἐλεηθῶσιν). Note especially that νῦν, which is unfortunately not found in the later manuscripts of the Bible and hence not in the King James Version, but which is found in the earliest and best manuscripts. Now is the time for them to obtain mercy, *now* is the acceptable time also for the Jews. No one should be deluded into inactivity in mercifully bringing the Gospel to the Jews by any thought of a possible special future dispensation for them.

With this conception of the conversion of Israel agree also

the tears of our Savior shed over Jerusalem (Luke 19:42) and his lament in that connection: "Would that thou hadst known in this thy day!" That was the special day for Jerusalem and all the Jews—before the fullness of the Gentiles began to come in—the acceptable day of the Lord, when the Lord visited His people (compare Is. 61:1-7 with Luke 4:17 ff). Since that time, for the most part, the veil has been before their eyes (2 Cor. 3:12-18), the veil which only faith in Christ could remove, faith of which Paul (Rom. 10:17) writes: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." As for the great bulk of the Jews, the Apostle's and hence God's verdict was a fateful echo of that pronounced upon the godless Amorites of old. In Gen. 15:16 it was said of the Amorites, according to the Septuagint: οὐπω ἀναπλήρωνται αἱ ἁμαρτίαι ἕως τοῦ νῦν (the sins of the Amorites have not yet been filled up until now). Compare this with Paul's words concerning the unbelieving Jews in 1 Thess. 2:16: ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας πάντοτε (to fulfill their sins always). And he adds: "There has come already (ἔφθασεν) upon them the wrath unto the end (εἰς τέλος)." No, Paul has no rosy millennialist delusions as to a special dispensation for the Jews of the latter days.

So we could also summon Peter the Apostle to the circumcision, and the writer to the Hebrews. Both, far from furnishing food to batten millennialist dispensational folly, offer more Old Testament prophecies which they interpret in a spiritual sense of God's New Testament Church. Especially striking is the use made of Jer. 31:31-34 in Heb. 8:6-13 and 10:15-23; Hab. 2:1-4 in Heb. 10:36-39, as well as of Hosea 1 and 2 in 1 Pet. 2:10. Snowden (*op. cit.*, p. 218) has put the case well: "Peter also spiritualized the Old Testament and buried the Jewish eschatology when he wrote: 'Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.'" Again: "The whole argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that the old dispensation is fulfilled in the new and has now vanished as 'a shadow of good things to come' (Heb. 10:1)." The writer to the Hebrews certainly makes impossible any actual restoration of Jewish offerings

for sin, as a literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40—48, especially 43: 19-20, demands, and as leading millennialists, such as West, Peters, Campbell Morgan, etc., insist will take place. "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. . . . Now, where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin," Heb. 10: 14, 18. The writer to the Hebrews, too, gives the Gospel, with its divine promises, as the only hope of the Jews (4: 1-3; 6: 18-19). Their only future glory lies in the "eternal inheritance" (9: 15) and not in any earthly superstate. Those who have that inheritance "are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12: 22). Remarkable words these — describing, as they do, the Christian Church under unmistakable Old Testament figures! In line with this, the holy writer urges the believing Jews to "exhort one another daily, while it is called *today*, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, for we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (3: 13-14).

Truly, Peter was filled with the Holy Ghost when he bore witness before Cornelius of the Prophets and their message (Acts 10: 43): "To Him give all the Prophets witness that, through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Yes indeed, the Kingdom of God, proclaimed by the Prophets of old, is not meat and drink (carnal), but righteousness and peace (spiritual).

As Snowden very ably points out, thrice has the spirit of Judaism attacked the Christian Church: first in the time of the Apostles through the Judaizers, then in Romanism with its legalistic ceremonial and hierarchical tendencies, and finally in millennialism. "Premillennialism is a recrudescence of Judaism. It is Judaistic in its method of interpreting the Scriptures, in its views of the Kingdom, in its means of establishing the Kingdom, and in its expectation of the restoration of the sacrifices after the second coming of Christ. This is indeed renouncing the logic of Paul and turning back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments and putting our necks again under the Mosaic yoke of bondage" (*op. cit.*, p. 217). From this preserve us heavenly Father!

Pekin, N. Y.