

ARTICLE III.

THE SECOND ADVENT AND MODERN THOUGHT.

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THE second Advent of our Lord has ever been a topic not only productive of interest, but provocative of disagreement. About it there has gathered so much of folly, fantasy, and fanaticism that the very mention of it moves many to derision and more to impatience. Many who have claimed by right divine exclusive proprietorship of the entire truth of the doctrine have made it seem like a ship without ballast, rolling in crazy fashion upon a sea of ignorance, superstition, and absurdity. Notwithstanding all the fortunes of war, the advent of the Master, with the eschatology that clusters about it, must ever remain a subject of importance to the Christian.

Formerly the church was divided into two camps — pre-millenarians and postmillenarians. At present, because of a shifting of the center of interest and of a division of opinion concerning the sense in which Christ will return, these terms are obsolescent; instead we might express the antithesis of more modern judgment by referring to those who believe that the Kingdom of God will be ushered in by evolutionary processes as opposed to those who hold that the Divine Kingdom will rather come as the result of cataclysmic forces. It is because the writer believes that the accretions of absurdity may be torn away and a sane examination of these problems undertaken that he has made bold to pen this paper. The paper

is born in the belief that more than is usually supposed may be said for the catastrophic view and that furthermore, unless pressed to the extreme, there is no necessary antagonism between the two positions. Scripture, science, and history may be levied upon to instruct us concerning the nature of God's processes in the world. Such an investigation here must be cursory in the extreme if it is not to transcend the exceedingly moderate limits of this paper. Nevertheless I believe that sufficient illustration may be gleaned to elucidate the position taken.

The thinking world — and the world that fancies it thinks, but does not — lies under the spell of Darwinian influence. Yet evolution has another meaning than that of biology, and there is a sense in which a theory of development long antedates the great Englishman. The Greeks' view of the world was one of progress and development. They broke through the crust of conservatism and the system of repression that lethargized the ancients in general. If their mythology painted their golden age upon the canvas of the past, they did not seek to regain it by a policy of stagnation, but welcomed changes which might be steps to a higher plane of opportunity and achievement.

Likewise the dawn of the modern era brought with it the conception of development. The world was regarded as a unity. The roots of the present were to be discovered in the past. Processes were conceived of as orderly rather than due to the incalculable action of occult forces.

It was Darwin, however, who gave a new content to the term "evolution." And from the biological realm where Darwin applied it, the idea has gone forth as a conqueror in foreign parts and now dominates philosophy, science, art, politics, ethics, religion. It was of course inevitable that the accept-

ance of this theory should lead to a reconstruction of methods in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Now the Bible is regarded by many as a text-book of evolution. For reasons which we need not trace, there has been, in recent years, an increased social interest and emphasis. Here, too, social evolution modeled after the Darwinian type is supreme. We are not concerned with Darwinism nor neo-Darwinism, nor its modifications; but merely with pointing out that it is not the idea of development, but this particular, rigid form of the theory, applied promiscuously and as an absolute standard, that has engendered the antagonism between the two schools of eschatological interpretation which it is the aim of this paper to discuss.

The position of those who hold that the Kingdom of Heaven comes by development is, that God's method is evolution — biological, individual, and social. The gospel for the individual, in conjunction with the social gospel contained in the idea of the Kingdom, is by evolutionary process to remodel the world. The position can best be apprehended by a reference to those parables of our Lord which, it is alleged, define, justify, and illustrate their view. An adherent of this interpretation would speak in much the following way: "The early Christians, influenced by the apocalyptic literature of the Jews and the disasters such as Jerusalem's destruction, entirely misapprehended the teachings of Jesus, and consequently expected very quickly the second Advent of the Lord, accompanied by divine judgment. In reality," thus runs the argument, "Jesus set forth his conception of the Kingdom in very different terms. He said it is like a mustard seed, that naturally, and according to the laws of growth, becomes a great tree. It is like leaven, that gradually permeates the whole loaf. It is like the seed that is sown, and that grows according to a slow, orderly process,

‘first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.’”

It is right to state that there is an alternative interpretation of these parables. There are those who fancy that there is an abnormality in the growth of the mustard-plant from a minute seed to that which is neither a bush nor a tree. The suggestion is made plausible by the reminder that in the first parable of the series (Matt. xiii.), the birds that here take refuge in the tree are the enemies who stole the seed. According to this view, the growth is not of a character to advance the real interests of the Kingdom. The parable of the leaven is susceptible of similar explanation. The interpretation that the leaven of evil influence permeates the Kingdom is at least worthy of consideration. That to the Jews leaven was something to be avoided would be admitted. Furthermore fermentation is a process of dissolution that, left to itself, ends in putrefaction and destruction. The reason yeast makes bread wholesome and palatable is because it is not allowed to do its full work. Heat kills the process of fermentation. The bread is placed in the oven, and the action of the leaven is arrested.’

By all means the strongest evidence in support of the development theory is found in that parable related by Mark of the growth of the seed by the recognized stages of its development. The parable undoubtedly implies growth in the Kingdom, but not of necessity in the explicit manner that is often assumed. The Lord sows the seed. In the eyes of men, he leaves it to its own course until the day when the crop is ripe. Then comes the harvest, and again the Master of the field is beheld gathering that which the ground has yielded. Just what is meant by development in this parable is somewhat indefinite. On the other hand, there are parables in this same series that without ambiguity imply the catastrophic; for instance, that of the wheat and the tares. The wrong perpetrated by sowing the

tares remains unmended until the harvest. Likewise the parable of the fisherman who hauls in a net with fishes good and bad. Here is affirmed an unsatisfactory state, in which the good and the evil are mixed inseparably until the time of the end.

Our point is not that development is ruled out, but that the scriptural evidence supporting the ordinary theory of the Kingdom of God by evolution is extremely attenuated. Undoubtedly there has been growth: (1) numerically, from the few disciples of our Master's day to the millions of our own time; (2) in outward acquiescence in the teaching of our Lord. Christian standards are very generally adopted in theory, and Christian sentiment is influential among the nations; (3) in achievement, as is instanced by the magnificent example of modern missions; (4) in a qualitative sense, most notably in the spread of humane sentiment. A world that was almost barren of merciful provisions for suffering humanity has been largely irrigated. Through the teaching of the church, sympathy has been brought from the divine heights, and barren places have become beautiful, because of the blossoms and fruit of compassionate benefactions. Possibly in other respects there has been deterioration. But this is true: any conception of the Kingdom of Heaven must include the idea of development. We must conform to facts. Development is a fact.

Argument from analogy is not convincing. Yet one may feel that there is unrealized logic for the cataclysmic in God's method as exhibited in cosmic processes. Consider the rocky page from which the geologist has deciphered the romantic story of remote ages. The earth has not been prepared for human habitation by a purely gradual process. Instead, we learn of well-defined periods during which continents were be-

ing formed, rivers traced, mountains carved, and titanic forces gathering strength for a mighty cataclysm which brought the period to an end. Rumbling earthquakes, grumbling volcanoes, crashing glaciers — such are the sounds that punctuate geological evolution. Progress has been by strides and leaps — convulsive and catastrophic as much as by quiet and gradual advancement. Biology presents an even stronger case. There are stages in the history of life when evolution stands impotent. It is not difficult to understand how the notochord may be developed into the backbone; but how can consciousness of consciousness be evolved from mere streams of consciousness? There is an explanation. It is not evolution. God has acted directly. He has breathed into man his spirit. It is increasingly recognized that geography is a most important factor in history. Great migrations which have marked new epochs in human progress have been caused in both historic and prehistoric times by severe climatic changes. Rapid desiccation, for instance, in previously habitable parts, has driven people to seek new homes — that is, to leave sacred associations, enter into new experiences, mingle with strange nations: to make progress. History has been the record of revolution quite as much as of evolution. And often revolution has been accounted for as the result of the influence of some great genius, as in the case of the first Napoleon. Nor can we who do not accept the materialistic explanation of history feel that the great man is so much the product of his times that he is only the expression of the spirit of the age. There enters, as an important factor, the incalculable one of the man's own spirit.

The standpoint of Christian reflection compels us to accept a catastrophic view. The pivotal event in human history is one the adequate explanation of which is not to be found in any processes of development. Jesus Christ is not the product of

evolution. Israel might prepare for the Christ, but Israel could never produce the Christ. The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ means God's action upon the world in an entirely new way. It was, as we are using the word, *catastrophic*. Similarly we believe that Pentecost, with its enduement with power from on high, was catastrophic.

But let us turn to the specific evidence of the Bible, and more especially of our Lord's words as to the consummation of the Kingdom movement.

It is generally admitted that the early church expected the Day of the Lord to be ushered in with portents indicative of impending judgment. This expectation is reflected in and inculcated by the New Testament literature. That the Apostle Paul was scanning the horizon for the signs of this new era will be scarcely questioned. In a startling figure he represents the whole creation in a thralldom, awaiting the appearance of the divine deliverer. In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians his look is eagerly heavenward, in hope of his Lord's advent. He pictures the day of Jehovah (chap. v.) as a day of divine indignation which shall come suddenly. In the second letter he anticipates the revelation of "the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming" (ii. 8). In writing to Timothy he expresses himself as fearful of the perilous times of the last days. The Epistle to the Hebrews contributes little evidence, save in such a statement as ix. 27, which appears in harmony with the Pauline thought. James urges patience because "the coming of the Lord is at hand." "But the end of all things is at hand" is Peter's feeling (1 Pet. iv. 7). The buzz of criticism is so loud about Second Peter that we need not dwell upon that disputed Epistle. But the catastrophic predicate is there unmistakably and indisputably. What

has been asserted of Second Peter applies equally to Jude. The similarity of the two books has long been a factor in the discussion of questions concerning them. John warns his readers that the last hour is preceded by the Antichrist. Whatever may have been the historic occasions and explanations of the Apocalypse, the author is clearly contemplating the hour when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord. This consummation is symbolized in lightnings proceeding from God's throne, earthquakes convulsing the earth, stars hurled through the heavens, vials of wrath poured out, trumpets of judgment sounded, the smoke of destruction ascending, and the terrific crash of armies in the great Armageddon.

For many, however, the authority of Paul and Peter and John has been undermined by the modern conception of inspiration and revelation. To them, all this is not convincing; still less is it conclusive. They feel Paul may have been mistaken — certainly the Parousia was not to be as soon as he anticipated; Peter may have been influenced by the prevailing sentiment; John carried from his moorings of divine intuition by ecstatic fervor. What did Jesus think? He is still master. He is still teacher. He is still Lord. He still speaks with authority. Still 'may we say

"Christ — the one great Word
Well worth all languages in earth or heaven."

We have already observed that, although the teachings of Jesus by no means exclude development in the Kingdom, he made no clear declaration that such were the means by which the Kingdom should reach its consummation. On the other hand, there is evidence, abundant and unambiguous, that our Lord expected the Kingdom to come by catastrophe.

The Gospel of John we may pass over. The theme and

treatment are such as to preclude this phase of our Lord's teachings, except for what implications may be discovered in such contrasts as that of eternal life with judgment. To the Synoptics then. There is the battle-ground where the issue must be decided. The great scenic prophecy of Matt. xxiv., with its parallels in Mark and Luke, is a graphic and explicit affirmation that the Kingdom in its final form will be born only in throes. That indicates the catastrophic. Now let us remind ourselves of these facts: (1) that these prophecies purport to depict the time of the end; (2) that only by an accommodation can a complete fulfilment be found in any event such as the destruction of Jerusalem, and Luke plainly distinguishes between the destruction of that city and the coming of Christ; and (3) that these passages are well attested, bearing the witness of the three Gospel narratives. To urge that Jesus never uttered these words, or that the disciples so confused his words as to deprive them of meaning, is criticism run wild. Such criticism leaves us in the air, not in a dirigible or aeroplane, but in a balloon without ballast, rudder, or parachute attachment — at the mercy of every cross-current of fancy or prejudice. In this paper we presuppose the substantial accuracy of the reports of the evangelists.

One other preliminary objection remains to be considered before we examine the prophecy itself. It is alleged that our Lord expected the fulfilment of these prophecies within a lifetime. Did he? This belief has been adduced from two passages. Matt. xxiv. 34 reads, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." A glance at our lexicon reveals an alternative translation of *genea*, i.e. "race" for "generation." I need not pause to discuss other explanations; as that, "this generation" refers to the one contemporaneous with the events predicted, or that of Plummer who be-

lieves the generation our Lord addressed and the destruction of Jerusalem are taken as a type of the later consummation. The other passage is Matt. x. 23, "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come." Three suggestions have been offered concerning that verse: (1) that Matthew's insertion of it in that place was an error; (2) that the coming referred to was of a different sort from that ordinarily meant; and (3) that the discourse refers to a particular mission, limited to the Jews, and extending to that time, anticipated by Paul, when Israel shall be grafted into their own olive-tree. But the real answer to the objection raised by these two texts is found in the principle of explaining the obscure by the obvious, instead of reversing the process, with the result of obscuring the obvious.

There is no manner of doubt that our Saviour believed in what we term a deferred Parousia. The twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew and its parallels do not represent history as rushing to its climax, but pursuing its ordinary course — wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, the crashing of governments, pestilences, the gospel preached throughout the world. The parable of the Virgins implies a long enough period for one-half of those who were waiting the Bridegroom's return to grow careless and fall asleep. The servants entrusted with the talents have abundant opportunity for investment and accumulation. Luke tells us that the parable of pounds was given expressly to correct the impression that the Kingdom should appear immediately. Likewise the parable of the unjust judge implies an interval which seems unbearably long. But, over against all that might be argued on the other side, we place the explicit statement of our Lord concerning his advent, that of the day and hour knew no man, nor angel, nor even the Son. It is inconceivable that Jesus would in one breath make

a prediction that the time could be known so very definitely, and in the next breath profess ignorance so absolute upon the subject. But we must not allow ourselves to be swirled from the main current into an eddy. The time element is of interest to us only as it affects our thesis that Jesus taught a catastrophic termination of the present order.

What, then, are the characteristics of the coming of the Son of man as set forth in this chapter (Matt. xxiv.)? Terrible tribulation, the mourning of the tribes of the earth, a selective judgment, God's elect gathered from all the earth — those are the characteristics. It shall be like the days of Noah or Lot, carelessness, festivity, the pursuit of the ordinary vocations, and then a sudden and unexpected catastrophe. Take the following chapter (Matt. xxv.). The wisdom of the wise virgins is not so contagious that the foolish become wise. The Bridegroom comes, and the foolish lament what is to them a catastrophe. The servants to whom is committed their Lord's money behave about as human nature has always behaved, even until their Lord's return; and in the conclusion of this remarkable discourse of Jesus we have the King not coming to a world ready to welcome him, but to one where sheep and goats are still to be found. His throne must be a throne of judgment.

To confirm our conclusion, we call to mind again the parables of Matt. xiii., and notice that there also the time of the end is represented as a time of judgment. And, finally, as a climax to all, we may listen to that amazing question of our Master, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

Let us seek to weave together these threads of our discussion. We have no quarrel with progress. Evolutionary hypotheses have pragmatic value — so far as they work let

us accept them. But we do quarrel with any scheme of evolution or catastrophe which men accept, not because the evidence justifies it, but because their minds fancy it; and which then holds them in its vice-like grip, works its pleasure with them, until, blinded and manacled, they are sent out to deal with facts. The natural result is that the facts are discarded, disregarded, or distorted in such a way that they may be forced into the preconceived theories. This indeed is pernicious and prevalent. Aside from this, we may, with Tennyson,—

“doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of
the suns.”

To be sure, we may mistake progress, and label that progress which is retrogression, and label retrogression progress. We may give expression to the hopes of our optimism or the despair of our pessimism, rather than to our sober judgment. But, nevertheless, the Master has sown the seed. There is the nurture of the sower, the potency of the seed, the fertility of the soil, and so development. But neither ought we to disregard the Scriptures that teach, nor disdain the Christian who believes, that the church and world will not grow in grace and glory by a process gradual but sure until righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the seas, and the fullness of the Kingdom be realized. There is a story told of a lecturer who remarked that in the course of time — perhaps two hundred million years — the sun would be a dead cinder and the earth as a result would freeze and its inhabitants perish. Just then a man in the audience, with every sign of agitation and alarm, as one who felt himself on the brink of destruction, gasped, “How many years did you say?” When told two hundred million, the man sighed with relief. “Oh! I thought you said two hundred.” To hear some men talk one would suppose

that this old world was going on forever, and that both it and the sun were exempt from the law of birth, development, decline, and death. It matters not when. God's purposes will be realized by the catastrophic. Development within certain limits and along certain lines we may have, but wheat and tares shall be separated only by harvest.

In our emphasis upon the Kingdom of God, it is to be feared that sometimes we miss not only doctrinal instruction from the attitude of the apostles and early church in reference to our Lord's Advent, but also the value of the practical meaning and the beauty of the motive behind it. Paul, for instance, had seen a vision of his Lord, and that vision had transformed his life and entranced his heart. He worked ardently for the Kingdom because Jesus was the King. His controlling ambition was to know him in all the perfection of his character and power of his Saviourhood. It was the love for Jesus, and the love of Jesus within, that impelled the great apostle. Thus he waited for his Lord. And should it not ever be so with the Christian? Is there no danger that we shall lose the King in the Kingdom?

A century ago, while the allies were wrangling over the division of Europe, Napoleon I. was exiled on Elba. At the expiration of a year, Napoleon, growing restive under forced retirement, left Elba and again set foot on the shores of France. The news flew over the country, and the veterans of Marengo and Austerlitz flocked to the standard of their general, while the young men who had heard the stories of his glorious victories hastened to enroll beneath his colors. It was not the Napoleonic system that youths and veterans desired, it was Napoleon himself. The magnetism of the man explains the enthusiasm. While we work for the Kingdom let not our desire be diverted from the King. When that great day of the

Kingdom shall come, then shall flock to the standard of the cross God's saints from every age, not chiefly to establish the Kingdom, but because their eyes have seen the King, for "we shall see him as he is." And He shall lead them, not to a Waterloo of defeat, but to everlasting victory.