

inspired teachings, and because of the common consent of Christendom that it is the most adequate explanation of the power of the Gospel on the human heart. On the same grounds we accept the elaborate definitions included in the Nicene Creed and the Quicunque Vult. Not a word in these formularies has not gone through a fiery trial of searching criticism in respect to primitive credentials. Nor is it probable, despite all that God is teaching us to-day by the agency of science, that on this central subject we shall ever attain a fuller knowledge. But, outside this sacred province, in our definitions of miracle and inspiration, in our conception of the relations of the human soul to God, and (yet more obviously) in the adjustment of the Christian organization to the real needs of modern society—the principle travestied by Loisy is continually operative. The “evolution” of which we have heard so much is indeed discernible in the larger apprehension by man of truths themselves unchanging. But its governing factor is not the ukase of any ecclesiastical authority, however centralized. Rather is it our individual realization of a Divine Providence which directs the progress of all human intellectual acquisitions, and our own accommodation of these to the teachings of a spiritual faculty assured of the Saviour’s continual presence. May our own Church continue to produce men endowed with sufficient wisdom to distinguish its limitations and to harmonize “things new and old.”

ARTHUR C. JENNINGS.



ART. III.—THE SECOND ADVENT AND THE CHURCH OF TO-DAY.

THE circumstances of our Lord’s first coming serve as a signal warning to the Christian Church of to-day. Jerusalem knew not “the time of its visitation.” It was unprepared for the suddenness of Christ’s appearing, and for the manner in which He came. But it is clear from the New Testament narrative that there was a remnant of believers who were ready for Him, and had reason to anticipate His manifestation. St. Luke’s expression, “all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem,” indicates the existence of such a body. Simeon and Anna are mentioned as examples, and the parents of the Baptist shared the same simple-hearted faith. The Baptist’s mission, in preparing the way of the Lord, affords further evidence. Its importance, to which such

marked prominence is given in all the four Gospels and the Acts, is strangely overlooked by modern critics. That John bore witness to our Saviour as the Messiah is indisputable, and it cannot be pretended that he derived his ideas of the Messiah from apocalyptic literature of the first century B.C., or that his teaching was "coloured" by it. One of his most striking characteristics was his individuality. He had no master but Christ, and stood entirely apart from contemporary thought and opinion. Upon the Jewish Church his testimony produced little effect. The chief priests and rulers, we are told, did not believe him, and found themselves in a dilemma when they were asked whether his baptism was "from heaven or of men." But the common people, who were nearer to the truth than the ecclesiastical authorities, held him to be a prophet. How deep and permanent was his influence may be seen from the Acts. Apollos, when Aquila and Priscilla found him, knew "only the baptism of John," yet is described as "mighty in the Scriptures," as "instructed in the way of the Lord," and speaking and teaching diligently "the things of the Lord." The first twelve Christians of the Church at Ephesus baptized by St. Paul had been previously baptized "unto John's baptism," and the narrative shows their readiness for the reception of the Gospel. The point to be noticed in these passages is that John's followers entertained conceptions of the Messiah which were wholly different from those current among Jewish opponents. The same fact meets us in the Gospels. Several, if not all, of Christ's disciples were former disciples of the Baptist.¹ They had been taught by him, and then joined our Lord as soon as they made His acquaintance, recognising Him as the Messiah before He had worked any miracle. Take the instances of Andrew, Peter, and Philip. The causes of their joining Christ were three—the Baptist's witness, our Lord's words, and the prophecies of Scripture. Their acknowledgment of the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth dated from the moment when they first knew Him.

Thus, the New Testament itself supplies convincing proofs that at the time of our Lord's first coming, and especially at the beginning of His ministry, there were two *distinctly opposite conceptions* of the person of the Messiah and the import of prophecy. Zacharias and Elizabeth welcomed in the Virgin's Son the horn of salvation promised to the House

¹ It may also be observed that, after the murder of the Baptist, "his disciples came, and took up the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus" (St. Matt. xiv. 12). The authorities of the Jewish Church seem to have shown no concern.

of David. To Simeon and Anna the Holy Child presented in the Temple was the light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel. John the Baptist proclaimed Him to be the Lamb of God. Men whom John had instructed rejoiced at finding Him "of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write." And long years afterwards the effects of the Baptist's teaching were still to be discerned in cities of the Gentile world which the Gospel gradually reached, where "the way of the Lord" was already being taught, and only needed to be known "more perfectly."¹ On the other hand, the Jewish Church rejected Christ from the first. The question, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" was put on one occasion with the fullest confidence that it could only be answered in the negative; for the official classes had long made up their mind as to what the Messiah would be like, and how He would come, and between the traditional idea and the outward aspects of the person and work of our Lord there was no manner of correspondence. His opposition to these classes contradicted their notion of the Messianic kingdom, which meant for them an augmentation of their own power and influence; and the words, "Let us kill Him, that the inheritance may be ours," express the sentiments our Lord Himself attributed to them. It is obvious, therefore, that the Baptist and his circle interpreted the prophetic Scriptures in one way, while the Jewish Church explained them in another. The meaning put upon them by the latter was partly the result, partly the cause, of unbelief, and it was demonstrated by the event to be wholly wrong. Those who adhered to our Lord belonged to a class looked down upon with disdain as "this people that knoweth not the law"; and the coming of Christ not only brought to nothing the false worldly wisdom of scribes and Pharisees, but vindicated in its minutest details the literal truth of the prophetic Word.

That the predictions relating to the Second Advent will be fulfilled to the letter in the same manner cannot be doubted. Its suddenness, when the time comes, is referred to again and again in the Bible, giving occasion to warnings of the most solemn description both in our Lord's discourses and the writings of the Apostles. As was foretold in Scripture, its long delay has led many to disbelieve in it altogether, and caused others to look upon it as a matter of no immediate

¹ St. Paul's reference to John, in his sermon at Antioch, should be noted. See Acts xiii. 24, 25. Compare, too, ver. 27. St. Paul's own view of Old Testament prophecy underwent a complete change when he was converted.

concern. A recent writer has remarked that "only in the nineteenth century" has the expectation of the Second Advent, as a probable event in the near future, "ceased to be present to the minds of most Christians."¹ This is but partially correct. There are even at the present day numbers of Christian men and women who wait for Christ's appearing with a hope no less ardent than that of believers in earlier and better times. They are to be met with in all ranks of life, and constitute a class of earnest and thoughtful students of Holy Scripture, who are unaffected in a singular degree by the strife of tongues going on around. Though they may differ on minor points, they are at one in their persuasion of the infallibility of God's Word, and in their looking forward to the coming of the Lord. But the statement quoted contains a certain amount of truth. The Church of to-day, comprehending Christendom generally, can hardly be called a waiting and expectant Church. As regards the Church of England in particular, the Second Advent is seldom mentioned in her pulpits, and has only once been deemed worthy of consideration at a Church Congress. It is a rare thing to find any allusion to it in reports of the meetings of our Church societies. The theological literature most in favour just now with the majority of the English clergy practically ignores it. In all these respects a marked change has taken place within the last generation. Many of us can recollect a time when the four weeks of Advent were not turned, as they so frequently are now, into a supplementary Lent. In numerous parishes that season of the year was devoted to its proper purpose, and was made an opportunity for systematic instruction on the return of Christ to judge the Church and the world. Whatever view the clergy took of the Second Advent, they consistently taught their people that it was certain and would occur suddenly, and inculcated the duties of preparation and watchfulness. Many of the older clergy, moreover, took a deep interest in the study of prophecy, a revival of which had been stimulated by the French Revolution. During the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century works on prophetic questions, some of them really valuable, were published by a succession of eminent writers, including such men as George Stanley Faber, the three Maitlands, Edward Bickersteth, E. B. Elliott, Professor Birks, and the late Bishop Ryle.¹

¹ "Faith and Knowledge," by the Rev. W. R. Inge, p. 188.

¹ The "continuous-historical" scheme of exposition, of which Mr. Elliott was the chief exponent, led to not a few extravagances. But certain parts of the "*Horæ Apocalypticæ*" are of value still, especially the notes and the fourth volume. A new edition is much needed of Charles Maitland's

Amongst other names were those of Mr. Davison, Isaac Williams, and Dr. Pusey; and even in the "Tracts for the Times" two numbers, which may still be read with advantage, were occupied with the subject. All this was not without its influence on pastoral teaching. Not only were various parts of the Bible rarely touched upon nowadays often explained, and inquiry into their meaning encouraged, but the current conceptions of the world's future were radically different from those now in fashion. It would be easy to show, by a comparison of published discourses of the older and later types, that the truth of our Lord's personal return to earth has been to a large extent banished from the modern pulpit.

The spread of the evolutionary philosophy may be considered one reason for this. "Science does not expect," it is said, "to hear the Archangel's trumpet." And consequently, in addition to an old assumption that Christ will not come again until the end of the world, we have the new assumption that the end of the world cannot take place until the forces of the universe have exhausted themselves—until the sun is worn out, or the oxygen of the atmosphere is used up, or something else of the same kind brings about a catastrophe as the result of physical processes extending over millions of years. The course of the world, it is taken for granted, will in the meanwhile be one of unimpeded natural development, and the idea of any interruption of the line of development mankind has marked out for itself is angrily resented. A well-known Professor announced some months ago that God is committing to man more and more every year the rule of the world and the guidance of society. Man, apparently, is to exercise the office which has hitherto belonged to Divine Providence. But modern thought, or what goes by that name, is a most unsafe guide on such matters, leaving out of its reckoning too many essential considerations. There are few things more significant than the fact that the general state of the professing Christian world, in its political and social as well as its religious aspects, corresponds with the forecast of its development contained in the Bible; and the tide of human affairs is steadily moving in the directions particularized there.

Another cause of the decreased interest in the subject of the Second Advent is the disparagement, not to say the denial, of predictive prophecy, due to rationalistic criticism.

book, "The Apostles' School of Prophetic Interpretation." People hardly realize how widespread was the interest taken in the subject in the "pre-Darwinian" period.

Predictive prophecy has always been an unspeakable offence to unbelievers, and it is not surprising that they should leave no means untried to remove it out of their way; but it becomes a serious thing when the objections of unbelievers are endorsed by those who claim to defend Christianity, are taken over and adopted by writers belonging to the new school of apologists, and circulated amongst people ready to pin their faith to what these writers say without further inquiry. Compromise with unbelief on this point, and adoption of its methods, are as fatal to a true understanding of the Bible as unbelief itself, for we have the express testimony of our Lord and His Apostles that Holy Scripture requires for its understanding acceptance of its truth. We are also confronted with the historical fact that the Jewish doctors and scribes, corresponding with our modern professors, were the very persons whose misreading of the Old Testament was demonstrated when our Lord came. History may repeat itself, and the fulfilment of prophecy may once again show to all men that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. It will be sufficient to say here that there are two weak points in rationalistic criticism, which will lead eventually to its ruin. In the first place, it is blind to the close connection and interdependence of the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments. Its treatment of the Book of Revelation furnishes an example. Secondly, it fails to face the question of the future of Israel. It assumes that Israel has no great destiny in store, and that no predictions in Scripture have reference to that destiny. In other words, it denies the possibility of unfulfilled prophecy, and thus seeks to foreclose a question that criticism cannot possibly decide, but the course of time only. When the critic declares that such and such events, which seem to be plainly intimated in Scripture, and are undoubtedly possible, cannot occur under any circumstances or at any future period, he claims for himself the gift of foreknowledge, and assumes the rôle of a prophet.¹ When, on the strength of this pretension to foreknowledge, he accuses inspired Prophets and Apostles of making "mistakes," it is evident that time alone can show which is the true and which is the false prophecy. The fact needs to be noticed that the critical theory itself is built upon a claim to be able to foretell the future—a claim wholly dependent for its verification upon the non-occurrence of certain contingencies.

It seems to be forgotten in some quarters that denial of the predictive element in Scripture strikes at the root of

¹ The notes on Isaiah xi. in various Commentaries and Introduction afford an example of this. Numerous other instances might be given.

the doctrines of the general Resurrection and the universal Judgment. Definite predictions in the Bible constitute our sole authority for those truths, both of which fall under the head of unfulfilled prophecy. Both of them, it may be added, are repudiated by critics of the thorough-going type, but can hardly be denied by anybody who assents to the articles of the Creed; and the representatives of the "new apologetic" have not yet explained how they reconcile their acceptance of them with their attitude towards prediction. The circumstance, however, of these truths being still unfulfilled prophecies is a sufficient indication that the prophetic portions of Holy Scripture have a far wider scope than is commonly acknowledged, and that prophecy was not limited to the single purpose of preparing the way for Christ's first coming, its horizon extending far beyond, and reaching onward to the end. In addition to this, the predictions concerning our Lord's return are very numerous, embracing many particulars, such as the signs of His appearing, the general condition of things at the time, the decay of faith and widespread apostasy from Christianity; and our Lord speaks of His coming as following immediately after the "great tribulation." Some passages connect His coming with the destruction of a blasphemous antichristian power, while others represent it as coinciding with a reversal of the present position of Israel, and introducing a millennial reign of righteousness and peace. Bishop Butler draws attention to the distinctness and "variety of expression" in the references of both the Old and New Testaments to that period. He points out, further, that the wonderful preservation of the Jews through "their long and wide dispersions," besides being in itself the actual fulfilment of some prophecies, should "naturally turn the thoughts of serious men towards the full completion of the prophetic history" relating to the kingdom of the Messiah.¹

As the Second Advent is the subject of this paper, not the millennium, it is unnecessary to enter upon a discussion of the latter. One would only say in passing that a belief which was almost universal in the first age of Christianity, which has been cherished by so many devoted Christians in later times, and is at this moment held by an immense number of thoughtful students of the Bible, cannot be dismissed in an offhand manner as unworthy of credence. But the real point to be kept in view is the absence of any warrant in Holy Scripture for supposing that our Lord cannot come again before the end of the world, the truth being that He might come, for all we know, very soon. Can any serious person

¹ "Analogy," part ii., chap. vii.: "On the Particular Evidence for Christianity".

contemplate the general state of Christendom, torn in pieces as it is with religious divisions, superstition and infidelity overflowing everywhere, and imagine that it will ever be transformed into an ideal kingdom of God by natural development? Who can mark the signs of the times without noting the increasing growth of a fierce antichristian spirit, both abroad and at home, that becomes more and more aggressive every year, and only needs power and opportunity to work its will? It is not so very improbable, after all, that these things may be presages of the events to precede Christ's coming, and that dark and stormy days of conflict are drawing near. The eventual manifestation of a false Christ, and persecution of Christianity, are by no means inconceivable. At any rate, the situation is such that it drives thousands who believe in the Bible—and there are thousands who will always continue to do so—to turn to the prophetic Scriptures for guidance and consolation. But the congregations in our parish churches are not taught, except here and there, and people complain with justice that the Church has no great and inspiring message to deliver.

“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The faith of Jesus, when the Gospel first went forth conquering and to conquer, was preached by evangelists and teachers possessed by the prophetic spirit or in sympathy with it. The Church of to-day is out of sympathy with it. If the testimony of Rome is Vaticanism, the testimony of our own Church is in danger of becoming whatever criticism pleases to dictate. Instead of the prophet we have the professor, and instead of the “things of the Lord” the things of the critic. The marvellous prophecies of the Old Testament are reduced to romances. The most solemn sayings of our Lord concerning His coming again are explained to be fragments of some apocryphal apocalyptic incorporated in the Gospels. The Book of Revelation is relegated to the realm of mythology. All this, embodied in popular text-books, forms part of the training of young men preparing to teach and shepherd the flock of Christ. It is not the Word of God, which endures for ever, that is in peril. But a Church that imagines it can make the Word of God of none effect with impunity has good reason to fear. And what makes its position more serious is its want of fear—its absolute unconsciousness that this may not impossibly be the day of its visitation, in which it is put to the test and called upon to make its choice between truth and falsehood. It forgets that nothing whatever stands in the way of the Second Advent except the completion of the time foreordained, and that the appointed hour may be close at hand.