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ment prophets and their experiences could possibly share that view ?¹

In order to define the main point clearly, I close my article with the following sentences :—

The Old Testament represents with conspicuous clearness the two religious practices which may best be described in the expressions “ idol-worship ” and “ image-worship ” (idololatri), as *two separate things*, as the two primary violations of lawful religion.² If, then, the representatives of that religion, among whom we reckon the historical writers of the Old Testament, occasionally speak of the image of a god as if it were itself a god (e.g. Exodus xxxii. 4 ; 1 Kings xii. 28) they did so merely in the effort after conciseness of expression. Every Old Testament critic ought, therefore, to regard it as a duty laid upon him by the laws of historical justice to distinguish clearly between definite statements of fundamental principle and language chosen in the effort after the utmost possible brevity, combined with usefulness for religious practice.

ED. KÖNIG.

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY.

III. THE RETURN OF CHRIST.

THE *prima facie* meaning of the Gospel records is that Jesus spoke differently of the Parousia on different occasions. He is reported as having said not only “ There be some here of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death till they see the kingdom of God come with power ” (Mark ix. 1), but also “ So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should

¹ The reader may compare the remarks on the origin of Old Testament religion in my *Geschichte*, pp. 92–118.

² In the decalogue, Exodus xx. 3, and v. 4 f. = Deuteronomy v. 7 and v. 8 f.

cast seed upon the earth . . . and the seed should spring up and grow . . . first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear " (Mark iv. 26-28). Taking one passage with another, here and elsewhere, we obtain an impression that at one time Jesus expected the Parousia in the immediate future,¹ at another beheld it far off, with an intervening period of gradual diffusion, at still another declared His inability to foretell its day or hour. In point of authenticity there is no appreciable distinction between these *logia*. If it be maintained that verses predicting an early Return show the influence of later Church thought, it may be also argued, in view of the contrast between St. Paul's earlier and later Epistles, that incipient Christian theology tended rather to soften eschatological emphasis, and that we are scarcely justified in charging to its account those Gospel passages which, to us, are difficult. But at all events one thing is clear—if Jesus could ever speak of the End as

¹ I am not prepared to exclude the idea that Jesus' predictions of an early consummation—their authenticity being assumed—may have been, like all true prophecy, morally conditioned. We have no right to make the choice one between saying that the later Church unconsciously tampered with His words, reading into them its own hectic dreams, and pronouncing Him a visionary. All promises are relative to faith. By this is not merely meant that only faith can hear the promise given, which is true enough; it is also meant—and this is what matters now—that only faith is able to receive the fulfilment. Throughout all His life Jesus asked for daring faith in the infinitude of God. Hence we are putting out of our minds what may be a vital factor if we decide *a priori* that it is wrong to regard our Lord's references to an impending climax as a great challenge to believing trust. Are we in a position to say what might have happened had the challenge evoked the response He wished for? For a powerful exposition of this idea, see Professor Hogg's *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*. He writes: "It may be only to our foolishness that His great hope seems foolish. May the Kingdom not really have been at hand—not merely that beginning of it which actually came to pass, but its consummation too? May it not have been simply the incredible obstinacy of human mistrust that needlessly prevented what might really have taken place? Our Lord knew that with the Father all things were possible—that nothing could be too glorious for God. Would He not, then, have been false to His Father if He had counted an early consummation unlikely?" (pp. 36-37). }

distant, then, although sayings in another vein do occur, chronology had for Him slender importance. For the date of the Parousia He cared little ; what He dwelt upon, in thought and speech, was its certainty and its abruptness.

In the literature of primitive Christianity the Parousia holds a commanding place. The writers of the New Testament are men who look on intensely to the great event ; life for them is moulded by a transcendent hope. Redemption as an experience, so far from making the Return of Christ otiose, renders it the chief object of anticipation. We are children of God, St. Paul felt, but one day there is coming a *full* manifestation of the sons of God ; we have the first-fruits of the Spirit, but we are waiting, on that very account, for the redemption of the body. The second Coming was to accomplish what the first Coming had left undone, and various prophecies, originally pointing to the advent of a pre-existent Messiah from heaven, were now applied directly to His Return. Only the first chapter of the story had been written. The Christian movement would grow by inherent Divine energies to an end, and with the end Christ would appear in person to vindicate His universal power.

It is pathetic, as the New Testament moves on, to observe how the circle of those who may be privileged to behold the Parousia is narrowed by degrees. At first all Christian believers hope for it in their life-time ; then it is promised to " some " ; finally, in the closing chapter of the Fourth Gospel, there is a guarded reference to the beloved disciple only : " If I will that *he* tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? " But the postponement thus necessitated by the will of God never seemed likely to be long. Nothing was expected in the least resembling the centuries of history.

In later ages, during periods of acute spiritual transition, this anticipation of an impending Return has repeatedly flamed up. Souls of an apocalyptic intensity have foretold

its imminence again and again, and special prodigies or tribulations have been regarded as the herald of Christ's final revelation as Judge and Saviour, one Church Father after another seeing in the events of his own day the promised tokens of the last things. The Reformation was itself an age of keen eschatological sensibility—a fact which explains much in the otherwise inexplicable apathy of the Reformers to missionary obligation. Antichrist has been discovered in a variety of Popes, in Luther, in Calvin, in Napoleon; and, to take a last instance, Bengel saw reason to believe the world would end in the year 1836. Many people, when they read such things, and consider how often the attempt has been made to write history before it happened, are under a temptation to dismiss the Parousia as devoid of either recognisable meaning or spiritual importance. Let us ask whether it is really so.

By way of preface, we may note how the fact that the hope of Christ's Return has remained unfulfilled is a reminder of the difference between true prophecy and apocalyptic. The difference is briefly this, that apocalyptic fixes, sometimes in mechanical and artificial modes, the details of the consummation to which a given process is leading, irrespective of human conduct, one chief reality in the case; whereas in prophecy only the consummation itself is fixed as certain. The apostolic anticipation of the Parousia, therefore, illustrates a point of view which applies to every prediction in the Bible—unfulfilled in a certain sense while yet true in spiritual import. There is a sermon by F. W. Robertson on "The Illusiveness of Life," in which this conception is stated boldly: "God's promises never are fulfilled in the sense in which they seem to have been given. The promise in the letter was unfulfilled. For ages the world's hope has been the second advent. Yet the Son of Man has

never come ; the promise itself had a deeper meaning."

No one, then, can really preach the Second Coming *verbatim et literatim* from a text of the New Testament. Even when he appears to be doing so, he has unwittingly introduced changes which deflect the initial sense ; for the primitive anticipation, as it comes to light in the Epistles, was that the Lord would come presently, before many years had elapsed. It is impossible to transfer *this* expectation from the first century to the twentieth, or to pretend that in so doing we are speaking in the sense of the apostles. No ground for this procedure can be pointed out in the New Testament. We have no reason to suppose that any apostolic writer, in predicting the Return, was thinking of our age.

Does this mean that the thought of the Parousia has lost its religious significance for the modern Christian mind ? By no means. Let us inquire what reasons we have for agreeing with a writer who said the other day that "the Gospel of Redemption is incomplete if it fail to include the hope of Christ's Second Coming."¹

First, the promise of Return is calculated to rebuke a false and superficial optimism. Nothing in the outlook of Jesus is more solemnising than the complete absence of what in reverence we may call sanguine or facile expectancy. When He spoke of triumph, as He did frequently, it was not as of something destined to occur within the present order. "My kingdom is not of this world." Undeniably He foretold that the Divine cause would make progress on the earth, but evil too is pictured as enjoying a real progress of its own. Tares grow along with wheat. Nowhere is there the faintest indication of a peaceful conciliatory evolution of the Kingdom, gently absorbing hostile forces as the ages lapse. There exists to-day a well-known type of

¹ J. G. Simpson, *What is the Gospel*, 20.

thought which takes the perfectibility of human nature by circumstances as its working theory, regards character as the mere product of nurture and environment, and insists that the true path to the *summum bonum* for man is to conduct life strictly according to scientific principles. And even when ideas of this sort are put aside, owing to the acknowledgment of Jesus' supremacy, the prospect held forth is an earthly one. "The wonderful life promised by Christianity," says a recent author, "will, like all the inferior forms of life, realise itself through a process of gradual and orderly evolution extending over many generations of mankind. . . . We believe that there is in store for mankind a far higher and more joyful existence than it has at present ; and we may even hope for the conquest in time of sickness and death." Now in this, despite elements that merit keen sympathy, there is something quite alien to Jesus' mind. The consummation of the Kingdom is not in the last resort dependent on the efforts of man. It is indeed true that Jesus affirms the power of prayer to expedite the climax, for the Father's purpose is no iron fate, and in response to prevailing entreaty the End may be hastened. At the same time, nothing could be more unlike Jesus' thought than the hypothesis of a mundane evolution, moving to its goal by infinitesimal and homogeneous increments and completing itself in a certain state of specifically earthly life. For Jesus the new order comes from God, by interposition, how and when He may think best ; the redemptive crisis is such as wholly to outstrip the powers of nature. Thus the idea of a Parousia recalls us to the Divine omnipotence as the source of all hope. It insists on those points in life where civilisation cannot help us in the least—points at which nature invades our personality, bringing home our mortality and sinfulness as real things from which it is impossible we should ever be self-redeemed. Complete sal-

vation can only be a new order from above.¹ It is the sense of this which, amid much that is fanciful, gives so poignant an interest to Father Tyrrell's last book. As he writes: "Shall progress ever wipe away the tears from all eyes? Shall it ever extinguish love and pride and ambition and all the griefs attendant in their train? Is it enough to give a man bread for his belly and instruction for his brain? Prolong life as it will, can progress conquer death, with its terrors for the dying, its tears for the surviving? Can it ever control the earthquake, the tempest, the lightning, the cruelties of a nature indifferent to the lot of man?"²

Out of the same great thought, also, there comes a suggestion for each new age of preachers. We set forth on our life-work deeply conscious of the infirmities of our predecessors. Only let us put the truth more credibly, we say; let us strip off the old superstitious orthodoxies and state the Gospel in modern terms, and everywhere men will listen and believe. A natural belief, and there is probably no man worth his salt but begins by sharing it. But experience brings disillusionment. It is the old world, we discover, and each generation has to face for itself the inexorably personal task of becoming Christian. There is no panacea that will rapidly sweep the masses of men under the power of religion—not the newest theology, not the pomp of Rome, not even the needed stress on social reclamation. It is not the fact that the world has been waiting for us. There were brave men before Agamemnon; the Gospel was

¹ This is a very different view from pessimism, in its pseudo-Christian form or any other; for pessimism is the belief that already the world is intolerably bad and will steadily grow worse. Over against this despondency the Gospel places the truth that the world belongs to God, not to evil, whatever hold evil may have got upon it. But it also faces the moral facts of experience, which declare unmistakably that life in this world is a moral conflict from which no one in any generation, however distant, and whatever civilisation may come to, will be dispensed.

² *Christianity at the Cross-roads*, 120.

preached with truth and faithfulness long before we were born, and both then and now it has encountered that permanent impulse or tendency in human life which the New Testament calls "the fleshly mind," and which Jesus saw persisting until the end of the world.

Again, our Lord's prophecy of His Return, as coincident with the arrival of the Kingdom in power, betokens a profound consciousness on His part of His own transcendence and centrality.¹ We underestimate the greatness of the personal claim involved in His eschatological utterances. As it has been put, "The eschatological hope anticipates a future in which the bliss and relief are mediated through the divine Christ. . . . The attitude of Jesus to the future kingdom meant neither a purely supernatural deity, nor an attitude of passive unethical expectancy upon the part of man, nor an order of things in which His own person was transcended."² His mind on this topic is quite clear. It is not merely that death could not vanquish Him; it was that He bent death itself into the service of His great mission, and even prior to Calvary beheld the Cross change into a throne. He laid His hand on all that should follow, saying, "It is Mine." Even there, in the final order, He would be mediator of the Divine life. All that can be called salvation, here or hereafter, is the effect and outflow of His Person, and bonds of an indisseverable strength will unite Him in the unseen to His obedient people.

Two supreme things are implied in this. (a) By thus announcing Himself as Lord of the future, Jesus indicated the reality of a vast supernatural order of love, power and wisdom, the stores of which are at His disposal, and on which His followers may draw. His supremacy is not merely ethical; it involves also transcendent energies and

¹ See Professor Andrews' paper in *London Theological Essays*.

² Moffatt, *Theology of the Gospels*, 69-70.

agencies. The Kingdom which He proclaims is "an order of things in which God's omnipotence is available to be freely drawn upon for the perfecting of the world and of human life." This, we may believe, was at least part of the truth underlying those elements in Jesus' teaching which ostensibly mean an early [Parousia. He employed a conceptual form native to the Jewish mind to express His own absolute control of the future. What filled His mind was the assurance that after His departure the powers of an endless life would still reach men through Him; and it is necessary to recollect that the *nearness* of the unseen and Divine, which Greek thought expressed in spatial terms, was more naturally set forth by Jewish thought in terms of time. My Father, said Jesus, is prepared to give now that which is perfect, and I have power to execute forthwith His perfect will.

It is in this direction, further, that the teaching of the Fourth Gospel appears to lead. That Gospel first marked the inclination of Christian thought to turn from exciting hopes of an imminent cataclysm and to dwell chiefly on the living presence of Christ with His Church. The End is not forgotten, but the strongest emphasis is placed on the actual and verifiable coming of the Risen Lord to dwell with men. Whatever be the exact form of His words, an undertaking is given that they shall have His spiritual fellowship; the living grace that went out from Jesus in Palestine, lifting away guilt and fear, will be enhanced by death, not lessened. Here is a fundamental truth embraced within the idea of a Parousia, which may be disengaged from its apocalyptic vesture. It is not the whole truth, as we shall have cause to note, but it is basal. It means primarily the existence of a supernatural order of relationship; a kingdom or system of experience in which Christ and all who trust Him are united, and in which faith and prayer elicit miracle; and

plainly enough it was this certainty that prevented the collapse of Christian religion when hopes of an immediate Advent died out. St. John filled the gap by the great conception of Christ's presence in the Spirit. Recent expositors of the New Testament have too often omitted this absolutely vital fact, that the anticipation of a speedy Return was never alone, by itself, in the apostolic mind. From the very outset it was accompanied, and therefore conditioned, by the knowledge of the Lord's perpetual nearness in the sovereign power of His resurrection. Thus the Johannine eschatology may be viewed as a providential transition-point between the fevered dreams of the first sixty years and the long labour of Church history. It forms the bridge by which faith crossed into the centuries in which alone the lessons of time could be acquired. Nor was this "transmuted eschatology," as it has been called, alien to Jesus' own mind. He had shown Himself quite certain that His death would promote the cause of God, that He would approach His disciples after death as the Living One, that a Spirit inseparable from Himself would be amongst them, and that "in the realisation of the Father's good purpose for men He was destined to have a commanding place."

(b) If, however, the fundamental truth here is that of a spiritual relationship between Christ and men, involving transcendent saving energies, the conception of the Parousia means also that this relation is to have a climax. The complete and universal triumph of Christ is as sure as His triumph over death. In the New Testament, resurrection and return may almost be called two sides of one fact. The world thinks that Jesus has been disposed of; the Church knows that because He is risen, all will yet be confronted with Him. The Christian prospect is not exhausted in the going of believers to where He is, singly and gradually—a piecemeal draining of life into the next world. There will

be a final manifestation of His supremacy in a mode recognisable by all and exhibiting the last issues of the Divine redemptive rule of all things in heaven and earth. This is an ingrained element of the apostolic faith. The Fourth Evangelist, for all his emphasis on eternal life as an actual possession, recurs as emphatically as the others to a last Advent, for which the Spirit's presence is no substitute, and which is nowhere resolved into purely immanent terms. He transcends the notion of a speedy Return, but he strikes as powerfully as ever the note of a Return at last. The two ideas meet in a single verse. "This is the will of My Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on Him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (vi. 40).

This expectation of the Lord's Return in power and glory will always remain a vital part of Christian belief. It is no primitive fanaticism, but redeeming hope toward God, to expect a real close of history, a worthy *dénouement* for the story of a world in which God has wrought salvation for men. The claim of Jesus to be Saviour is impaired when this is left out. He is not thought of as filled with all power except as we look to Him one day to make His work perfect. Salvation covers more than individual destiny; it is perfected only as the Kingdom is made perfect and Christ's perfecting of the Kingdom, coinciding with the end of this world, is His Advent. How it shall be accomplished, or when, is not our interest either to think or say, but the fact lies at the heart of faith. When we look at Biblical pictures of the End, characterised as they are by the abrogation of spatial relations, allusions to angelic influence, and insistence on mysterious convulsions of nature, we become conscious that the prefigured event lies in a new order of experience, and that to describe it in advance would be to limit the illimitable. Nevertheless, beyond these shadows, it stands

fast that the good purpose of the Father cannot be given full reality in space and time. The Kingdom is transcendent, and only under transcendent conditions—such as are in our minds when we speak of heaven and immortality—does it attain to final being. We speak according to faith in Jesus, therefore, when we affirm that the realisation of the perfect order will be mediated through a final revelation of what He is. He who is now creative and central in redemption will continue to be so when God brings in the world in which the new humanity may dwell.

Conceptions of uniformity and evolution, however, have produced a modern mind which even in many Christian representatives is hostile to all ideas of climax or crisis, whether in the soul or the world. It is held that process is constitutive of all reality which our minds can apprehend, and the apostolic thought of a regenerated universe, implying the transfiguration alike of spirit and of its environment, is put aside as devout poetry. Yet if we start from Christian premises, if we understand what a perfect conclusion from them would involve, it is hard to see how its arrival could be anything else than a genuinely miraculous event. It will not come out of the world; it will come from God. "The second coming," writes Haering, "is not an event within the present course of world-history, but it is its close."¹ Or, to put it otherwise, the final Kingdom is not something which now co-exists with the earthly evolution as the Church triumphant does with the Church militant. It replaces the development it has closed. But this means a transition which can only be described as a miraculous transformation.² There may be crisis for the world as conversion or death shows there may be for the single life.

To this there is no alternative but one which promises a

¹ *The Christian Faith*, 901.

² Cf. Herrmann, *Communion with God*, 96.

future in which faith cannot rest. Imagine the present order to persist ; then, even if sin be destroyed, there will remain everything that we class under the name of accident or calamity. No reason can be thought of why personal holiness should produce a radical alteration in the constitution of the physical universe. It had no such effect in the holiest life ever seen upon the planet. But a world in which pain and death prevail is not what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God. That is a world in which the Divine omnipotence has free course for the complete expression of Holy Love.

Still further, it must be denied that a society marked by sinlessness or perfect morality can ever be realised on earth.¹ It is not pessimism to say so ; it is truthfulness. Apart from all positive transgression, many grave omissions of

¹ It may be asked in astonishment how any one who takes this view of earthly possibilities can believe in social reform. This, it will be noted, is an objection which at bottom assumes that if Jesus really believed in a Parousia, near or distant, His ethics *must* be an *Interimsethik*. Its quality must be affected by His view of the future. For this general contention there is no ground, and we need not delay over it ; the morality characteristic of members of the Kingdom is what it is irrespective of all questions how or when the final phase of the Kingdom is to be established. But as regards social reform two things may be said. First, we have Jesus' command to help our brethren, and obedience to this is equally essential whether we do or do not believe that by our help we can give them *complete* happiness. To take the analogy of the individual, shall we say that a Christian is relieved from the obligation to be good because he knows he will never on earth answer to Christ's ideal, " Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven " ? But the obligation of social reform is as real as that of personal goodness. All we need know is that it is always in our power to make things a little better. Secondly, it is precisely because we have a Saviour great enough to make things one day utterly good and right that the moral energy necessary for great social tasks is generated in the soul. God would not put us off with a salvation which could be entirely realised in present conditions, and this very conviction is the source of true and useful service. As Haering puts it : " From all external optimism the Church is preserved by her principles : the Kingdom of God will never be perfected on this earth. But faith in the eternal consummation through the full revelation of Jesus Christ should be the greatest stimulus to the utmost exertion of all one's powers for the introduction of a better earthly future " (*The Christian Faith*, p. 909).

duty are occasioned by weakness of the flesh, and it is mere trifling to forget that moral evil consists in what we leave undone as much as in what we do. We are unable to conceive a Christian life on this side of death which had no failure to confess. But life apart from society is an abstraction. And can it be forgotten that what we call a "generation" cannot inherit the goodness of the past except as through discipline and endeavour it makes that goodness its own possession? The generations, moreover, are not in any rigorous sense successive; one overlaps the other, and the condition of the world at a given moment is marked by rudimentary moral attainments in large numbers of people as well as by advanced ethical life in some others. The prospect open to humanity, therefore, while existing conditions obtain, is unquestionably that of general spiritual progress, but such a progress as can never in itself, by the addition of *more* of that in which progress has hitherto consisted, lead to a perfect society.¹ In addition, the rejection of an ever higher goodness, by those who do reject it, both implies and causes an ever deeper evil. Hence the attainment of the final goal must take place through the interruption and supersession of the present order; and while it may be a question whether its arrival is rightly qualified as "abrupt" or "catastrophic," it is at all events something to which no sort of justice is done by the idea of homogeneous con-

¹ It is hard to see why perfection in the society should be looked for from protracted development; in point of fact, it is not thus attained in the individual. In the case of the individual there comes a climax, named death, which, as Christians hold, gives what can never be given by any development. There is continuity of personal life in and beyond the change, but also there is discontinuity of conditions. Similarly it is permissible to believe that the present phase of the Kingdom may terminate in a sudden crisis of fulfilment. No doubt the anticipation of earthly social perfection is in part due to a false use of the phrase "social organism"; it being forgotten that "organism" is here only a metaphor, since the self-conscious members of society are perpetually changing and their place being taken by new arrivals.

tinuity. And to this truth Jesus' conception of a Parousia recalls us.

Furthermore, apart from some such *dénouement* the course of human experience as a whole is devoid of ultimate significance. It is not too much to say that the world owes the sense of history to Christian belief in eschatology. Historic reality proper has no place in the Greek or Roman view of things. A writer like Thucydides or Tacitus makes no effort to relate the series of events to any universal end, which all serve as means. Biography, or the life-story of a state or people within a famous period, is done with unrivalled skill, but upon the whole the tide of incident ebbs and flows without adding anything of importance to the meaning of the world or revealing any universal purpose which is more than the process itself.¹ On the other hand, the Hebrew prophets look on to a future in which the will of God is implicated. They stand therefore for the truth that some supreme value attaches to the product of time, and representing as they do the first emergence of the idea of history as such, they are able to form the ethical conception of *Humanity*, moving on, not with aimless feet, but towards a destiny guaranteed by grace. From this time

¹ Greek thought disliked the conception of an absolute or final order, and escaped it by making the movement of the world circular. There are allusions to this in Plato and Aristotle, but its ultimate dependence on a pessimistic view of the universe comes out most plainly in Stoicism. After a reference to Zeno's teaching that in due time the universe would be absorbed in the primal fire, Mr. Bevan proceeds: "He forecast the beginning of another world-process which would follow exactly the same course as the present one, and end, like it, in the one Fire. And so on for ever—for the present process was one of an infinite recurrent series—an everlasting, unvarying round. We may wonder that the human mind has acquiesced in such a view of things, even when we allow for its recoil from the notion of an absolute end; but it has done so, not in Greece only, but in India, and even in modern Europe. Those, however, in modern Europe who have embraced the hypothesis of the Eternal Recurrence have never pretended to regard the world-process as governed by rational purpose" (*Stoics and Sceptics*, 51).

on the race is conceived as a unity, and the ground of unity lies in the plan of God. Thus the eschatology of the New Testament is another name for teleology at its highest power. In the light of Christ's Return, the darkness of pessimism is absorbed.

It is this reference of history and its issues to the purpose of God which alone provides a bond of continuity between present experience and the great future to which faith has always looked. The final summing of all things in Christ, on which Pauline thought rests as an unsurpassable height, suggests to the imagination the coming of a time when creation as a whole will be constituted the serviceable instrument of personality made perfect through fellowship with God, and, in Him, with His people. Nothing will remain in nature, civilisation, or social environment that impedes spiritual life or mutual service. This has been the Divine aim from the first. History, which has had its centre in the work of Jesus, will in closing pass beyond itself into a system of redeemed experience which preserves the fruit of earthly discipline and at last offers room to free and conscious spirit for unhindered self-expression. Everything in this is as ethical as redemption here and now. And perhaps its ethical quality may give us light on the question why the Advent, so passionately hoped for, is delayed. If the Gospel can only be propagated in moral and social ways, if its progress is conditioned by human influence and is relative to the moral attitude of men, the conclusion of the whole cannot be reached in haste, or before the truth in Jesus has been given an opportunity to reveal its inward riches. To this principle, as it seems, we are led by the New Testament prediction that the good news of the Kingdom must be preached throughout the whole world before the end comes—a suggestion underlined by St. Paul when he asks, respecting the eventual conversion of the Jews,

“ If their exclusion is the reconciling of the world, what shall their admission be but life from the dead ? ” (Rom. ii. 15). The thought of redemption as mediated through personal life and enriched by the mutual giving and receiving of all saints, so far from rendering a definite climax otiose, makes it necessary ; since the value of the entire movement can only become visible in the light of its culmination.

Thus the final revelation of Christ, who is the key to the history of man, and gives its last meaning to the universe, is necessarily construed in a twofold reference. It looks backward in so far as it consummates the redemptive activity of God ; it looks onward in so far as it leads over, by creative transformation, into the perfect order from which all that is recalcitrant to holy love is excluded, and in which disparate and contrary interests, native to the experience of earth, are finally reconciled in or withdrawn from the life of sons of God.

It is a great prospect, so great that only a regenerating faith will dare to mount up to the heights from which it can be seen. According to our sense of what Christ has done will be our answer to the question whether He will yet do more. Believing hope is generated by a Divine presence in the soul. *We through the Spirit by faith wait for the hope of righteousness.*

Christian fancy is apt to play about this theme, not simply or mainly in sense-forms, but in modes taught by the best it has learnt of the Father. It is uplifting to think, for example, that the revelation of Christ in the End may signify a great offer of Divine love to those whose eyes till then have been held. There may be a new and resounding call of the world to God ; a convincing disclosure of a Christ hidden before by false doctrine or the disloyal lives of followers ; the unreligious doer of duty seeing God and in one instant

made religious because now understanding "whose is the authority which he has been obeying, whose is the strength on which he has been really resting all these years." Upon the very borders of the eternal life, one sight of Jesus as He is may strike dead all doubt, all fear, all reluctance. In such dreams, assuredly, there is no harm. But if it should be so, it will none the less be the Gospel on which men lay hold. Nothing which may transpire to reveal the sweep of salvation as wider than had been known can impair the truth or value of that which has been already told in Jesus the Crucified. All who then respond to Him, if such there be, will respond through moral and spiritual motives.

If in conclusion we ask what has been the best service rendered to Christian life by the anticipation of the Lord's Return, the answer, I think, may be put thus. It has emancipated the mind from purely individual interests, and has gathered believing hopes round the fortunes of the Church. As long as the piety of an age is deep, strong, and fed directly from the New Testament, it will reject the notion that in this region faith is concerned solely with the private destiny of the single life. And the Parousia confirms this instinct, for it is to the redeemed society, not to any single person, that the promise of it has been given. When the Second Advent comes into mind, the proper object of desire and longing is not merely the lot of particular lives, much less our own, but the purpose of God to perfect His Kingdom and glorify His saints.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.