

## **CHRIST'S SECOND PERSONAL ADVENT.**

It is probable that at no time since the early centuries of the Church has this subject been lifted into such prominence as during our own generation; so that the remark made some years ago by the eminent German theologian, John Frederick Meyer, is clearly verified. He says: "With the Lord's second advent will begin the real reign of God upon earth. A kingdom of righteousness, holiness and peace....It is called the reign of a thousand years. Modern times have again paid attention to this doctrine of the millennium, thus coinciding with the ancient fathers. It is resounding, as it were, a new call: The Lord cometh!' Among believers, this doctrine, far removed from carnal conceptions, should no more be considered an error."

But the impatient question will be raised, "What practical value has this doctrine? True, it has been very dear to martyrs and confessors in the times of the Church's suffering and trial. But in these days, when the heavens are all ablaze with evangelical light, and all nations are illumined with its brightness, it seems an impertinence for you to begin to trim the wicks and relight the lamps of prophecy." So I thought, as on one cloudless day I was journeying toward the hills which form the western boundary of our State, and a porter came in and began to light the lamps in the car. "What is the need of lamps," I thought, "in such a cloudless and sunlit day as this?" But the next moment there was a shrill alarm from the whistle, and we instantly plunged into the dark and sulphurous darkness of the Hoosac Tunnel. It was clear enough now why the lamps had been lighted. And does not Scripture say something about "a [R853 : page 8] more sure word of prophecy unto which we do well to give heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts"? The dark places may be just before us; – who knows? The black hand of Socialism, armed with the most fatal weapons, and throwing its ominous shadow over almost every civilized nation; – the smoke of the pit ascending up in the

form of modern Spiritualism – ten millions of adherents gathered within less than fifty years – making such an outbreak of demoniacal agency as the world has not seen since the days just preceding the flood, – even thoughtful men of the world are beginning to be afraid at these tokens, and to question what they portend. But they who have lighted the lamp of prophecy think that they read the meaning of these things by its clear shining; and they surmise that this may be the reason why they have been called to light their candles at midday. God never makes half a providence, any more than man makes half a pair of shears. If he moves some in the Church to see clearly, and assert strongly a seemingly unpractical doctrine, it may be because he intends to match that doctrine to a certain exigency of error yet to arise.

"Fossil sunlight" is what Herschel named anthracite coal. The vast stores of sunlight poured out upon the globe during the old geological ages were consolidated and packed away in the bowels of the earth because this busy nineteenth century, with its myriads of railways and ocean steamers and manufactories, would need it. And have you thought how large a proportion of the Old Testament is prediction? And is it, therefore, of no use to the practical working Church of to-day? Nay. This vast profusion of prophetic light falling upon the minds of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and David, and the minor prophets, and treasured up in their inspired pages, may soon be needed. And they who are delving in these mines of eschatology, instead of being engaged in an aimless and profitless toil, may be providing the Church with the needed warmth for that predicted time when "iniquity shall abound, and the love of many wax cold," and light for the day foretold by the watchman of Idumea, "The morning cometh, and also the night."

And now we come to ask the question whether there is any faulty tendency in our current eschatology which this powerful reassertion of the primitive doctrine of our Lord's second coming is likely to correct? Here I speak with the utmost caution and with the sincerest deference to the views of others. But I am strongly persuaded that such a tendency does exist.

By a ghastly anachronism, death has been substituted for the coming of Christ in the common teaching; and thus a false centre has been set up in our eschatology, by which the doctrines pertaining to the last things have been thrown into eccentric relation. Ask the question, "When does sanctification end?" and the common answer is, "At death." Ask the question, "When do the rewards of the righteous accrue?" and still the answer generally comes, from evangelical theology, "At death." Ask the question, "When does the resurrection take place?" and the answer comes from Liberals and New Departurists, and from a considerable company of the orthodox, "At death." Thus death has been erected into such importance as to constitute the *terminus ad quem* of the life which now is, and the *terminus a quo* of that which is to come. Joseph Cook in his valiant defence of orthodoxy is thundering out the question, "Does death end all?" and often piling up such post-mortem conclusions as to compel us in defence of the Scriptures to ask, "Does death begin all?" To us it seems incontestably clear that the Bible makes the *Advent*, and not the grave, the supreme goal of the Church's hope. And lest you should accuse me of speaking presumptuously, I wish you would search the Bible for yourselves, and note how constantly the soul's progress towards perfection is inspired and bounded by that one divine event, the coming of our Lord. You can collate scores of texts to this effect, all finding a fitting climax and summary in that grand utterance of Paul as it stands in the Revised Version: "And may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, *at* the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The same may be said of the divine rewards; the promise of them is almost without exception timed by this great event.

– *A. J. Gordon.*

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