

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST AND THE GIFT OF LIFE.

There is one fact which is beyond all controversy; and that is, that in the early ages of the church, the hope, the principal hope, of the church was the return of her Lord. It is an equally incontestible fact that this faith faded and died; and it is only in our own days that it has risen to any great extent. For ages the church slumbered and slept, and was not aware of any such hope as the return of the Lord. What was the reason that this hope sank and disappeared? There is no effect without a cause. It is an unquestionable fact that this hope, which was so bright, the hope of the church, disappeared. What was the cause? This I think is a legitimate inquiry, one which we are bound to face. Can we suppose that the blessed hope died from inanition, that it was insufficient to comfort the church? I think it is not possible to take such a view as that. It has always been a living hope, one that has been able to purify the affections, and support the Christian in the midst of his trials. It could not sink for that reason. It is also equally impossible to suppose it would have been dropped unless some other hope had taken its place. The Church could not land itself in a hopeless position. It must always have a hope. What was it, then? I speak a fact that is incontestible, that the cause of the disappearance of this hope of the Church was the introduction of the doctrine of natural immortality. There is no question of the fact. It is sometimes said that the reason was that, when Constantine became a Christian, the idea got abroad that the Church and the world were to be one, and that with the spread of the Christian Empire with a Christian Emperor at its head, a triumphant Church would become universal. That no doubt, had its effect upon Christian truth. But we must go further back than that, if we wish to trace the source of this error. It goes back to the third century. Men – philosophers of the Greek school – were not willing to give up their heathen philosophies. Therefore they made a sort of compromise between heathenism and Christianity; and the man who thus signaled

himself was Origen, who, of all the early Fathers, did most to mystify and degrade Christian truth.

This philosophy taught that instead of receiving the gift of life from Christ alone, we have the element of it within us already, that we have the Divine essence, that cannot go out, and that we live, whether we accept God's offer or not, as long as God lives. It is false. It is not taught in the Book of God. But it was the introduction of this that did havoc with that grand and glorious hope of the return of the Lord. Just think of it. It worked its own natural result. Men could not possibly believe that they themselves possessed natural immortality, and yet look with anxious hope for a return of the *Life-giver*. The two positions are irreconcilable. And here you have the cause and the effect. I put it to you to consider it.

Further, we find that the resurrection suffered the same process of being put away as an active and definite hope of the Christian. The two things are inseparable. A man believes that he possesses life in himself; and it is all one to him whether the resurrection takes place sooner or later. But let a man be fully persuaded that on the return of Christ and on the resurrection of the dead depends all; that unless the Lord come, then there is no hope for him, I say it is impossible for him to put off to an indefinite future the return of his Lord.

In 1 Cor. 15 the apostle Paul speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He supposes for a moment that Christ had not risen, and the consequences that would have followed; and he sums up a telling argument in these words, concerning those who had fallen asleep in Christ, that if Christ be not risen, then their faith was **[R934 : page 6]** vain, they were yet in their sins, and "then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished;" and he concludes with saying, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Therefore, surely, on this is built the whole of the Christian's hopes, that Christ is risen and become the first fruits of them that slept; that on the

resurrection of the Christian himself depends the hope of what he looks forward for in the future life.

If you wish to see the danger of the false theology in all its virulence, go to the Church of Rome. There you will find worshipers offering prayer to the dead, to dead men and to dead women, offering perpetually to the Lord of glory as a babe in its mother's arms or as transfixed to the cross. They have forgotten that the Lord is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept. But, my friends, this whole Roman system is based on the dogma of immortality of the soul. Take away the coming of the Lord from Roman Catholics, and it makes no great difference; but take away the immortal-soul-ism and you sap its existence, you cut off the stream from its source.

– *Sel.*

