

ARTICLE IV.

THE PAROUSIA VERSUS THE SECOND ADVENT.

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THAT the apostles and the early church were in some measure mistaken about the Second Advent can hardly be doubted in view of the uniformity and weight of the evidence. That they expected to see an apocalyptic Day of the Lord before death should close their eyes, and that their expectations were unfulfilled, is a matter of New Testament record. To meet the cruel disappointment created thereby, certain passages in the New Testament were written; so that the disappointment which has been the lot of the church until our own day certainly began while the apostles themselves were yet alive. A closer examination of the New Testament sources of the strange faith which still holds the allegiance of a large section of the Christian church, should show its votaries that in clinging to the letter they have missed the spirit of the Parousia their Master taught. Experience should correct, as well as steady, faith.

Our doctrine of the Second Advent grew indirectly out of the apocalyptic Jewish literature, which never had a place within our canon, rather than out of our New Testament writings. Indeed, the bulk of the New Testament was not written until experience had shown the earliest conceptions of the doctrine to have been faulty. It should be noted that the Book of Revelation, which lends itself most to the traditional Advent, and which alone, of New Testament writings, teaches the millennial reign, was the last to gain admission within the

canon, and has had, perhaps, the most difficulty in maintaining its position there.

At best, the New Testament teaching on the Parousia is conflicting and uncertain. The time is very near: it is unknown: it recedes with the passing years. It will be within the present generation: before the gospellers shall have completed their tour of the cities of Israel: at the end of the age: at the consummation of the world. The Parousia is the appearance of Jesus to his disciples after the resurrection: at the disciples' death: personally to his judges, who shall see him in great glory: at a time when "every eye shall see him." One of the Gospels falls but little short of distinctly identifying the Parousia with the Paraclete. Sometimes to die seems to be to realize the Parousia immediately. Still again the kingdom to be established will be spiritual, invisible, without pomp; or it will be established by a most spectacular invasion of the earth by angelic legions, whose supernatural prowess will conquer and chain the powers of evil—a world-power carnal as that of Rome. The new power will work in society quietly as leaven: will develop naturally as a seed: or will be a violent intrusion from another world. The Fourth Gospel's reign of Jesus is spiritual. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Spiritual union with him is eternal life. The judgment is automatic and continuous,—in strange contrast to the apocalyptic Day of the Lord, with the Dantean cries of its victims to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Great King. The Paraclete and the Parousia would seem to be identified in a long process of enlightenment in the Christian church. The Gospels and Epistles know of no millennial reign, and such reign is foreign to Jesus' thought. Only the Book of Revelation teaches it, amid symbols and mysteries so perplexing and confusing as to make all inter-

pretation uncertain. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount is at variance with the traditional doctrine. If Jesus rather than the Book of Revelation be the basis of the faith, a reconstruction of the doctrine of the Parousia is inevitable.

Our doctrine of the Second Advent grows out of the Jewish conception of the Messiah. The Jews regarded the precocious dominion of David and Solomon as a lost Paradise, and indulged the hope that the path of the nation would one day lead back into an Eden of prosperity and power. Hope deferred, created and fed the most persistent and heroic faith of history—the belief in a coming age of gold and the universal reign of Messiah, which the stern reality of disaster and defeat was never able to dim. They fondly dreamed of a world-empire, long before the city on the Tiber had awakened to the conquest of her enviring peoples.

When the nation was scattered in exile, a great prophet proclaimed to the handful in Israel who kept faith with the theocracy, Jehovah's Suffering Servant, whose humility and suffering would prove the salvation of the nation. This was the finest conception of Messiah reached by the Jews, and continues a revelation of spiritual power to all ages. This conception Jesus countenanced and fulfilled, and in it lies the essence of the ethics of redemption for all times and worlds. But the idea of the Suffering Redeeming Servant contained in our canonical writings made no impression upon the popular mind. The Jewish writings and the popular imagination drifted steadily and persistently from it toward the sensuous views that in the end prevailed. Jesus' most spiritually-minded disciples protested against the Isaiahian suffering Saviour, and looked for a spectacular kingdom in which suffering was displaced by carnal triumph. "Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" photographs the Great Expectation of

the age, and illustrates the triumph of the sensuous over the spiritual in men even under the personal tutorship of Jesus. Paul's eventual partial emancipation from the national conception marks a brilliant chapter in the unfolding of his mind, and stamps him a son of genius.

Very suggestive is it that the Jews were indebted to their non-canonical writings for their prevailing view of the Messiah—the view that is responsible for *our* doctrine of the Second Advent. Within the Old Testament canon the doctrine of the Messiah is sane, ethical, spiritual: beyond, it runs riot in sensuous apocalyptic visions of the impossible and ridiculous. The Western mind revolts at the cherished pictures of Messiah's reign which sustained the Jews through the closing centuries of their national life, and while the New Testament was being created. The kingdom was to be restored in a glory of which the son of Jesse never dreamed. A lineal descendant of the beloved king would sit on the throne of the resurrected nation in triumph over its world-enemies. This Messiah would be heaven's high executioner to Jehovah's enemies. Already had the wonder-king been born into the world. To preserve him to a more opportune day, a Merlin-spirit of mystery had caught him up into heaven, from whence he would come in an august advent of glory to claim and win his throne among men. With him in the sky would come teeming legions of angels with supernatural power to sustain him in his great conflict. Some set the term of four hundred years to his reign, while others claimed for him a full thousand years of temporal glory. Then would come the cataclysmic end of all things, beyond which lay a field in which the imagination ran a wilder riot. The casual student can hardly fail to recognize the outline, and even much of the detail, of the current anticipations of the Second Advent, in these Jewish

non-canonical conceptions of the Advent of Messiah. Without a doubt they are the egg from which our queer bird was hatched.

Such were the expectations of the age into which Saul of Tarsus was born. The current conceptions of his nation were his personal inheritance and environment. He held the apocalyptic vision. He pinned his faith to Israel's great hope. To Augustinian faith he added Torquemadan activity in the interests of the current conceptions of Messiah's kingdom, and so persecuted vigorously the new church, because he rightly identified it as an enemy of the old faith.

In mid-career this Paul was arrested by a new light on the old problem of religion. The result of a mental and spiritual revolution was, that he accepted the risen Jesus as the Messiah for whom he had been looking. What a perplexing problem now confronted him! The old forms of faith were shaken; the new religion was yet inchoate—was to be, indeed, largely, the creation of his own mind. What of the old ought to survive in the new? Chief among the questions confronting him was, "What has become of Israel's crowning hope?" The Messiah who came, came not with pomp nor power. Because of the gulf between popular expectation and the spirit and purpose of Jesus, the nation had rejected and crucified him. But Paul had come to know Jesus as *Messiah*. How could this great active thinker reconcile the hope that had illuminated the dark centuries of the nation's decline, and to which he still clung with passionate patriotism, with the very mundane appearance of Jesus, and the preponderance of the natural over the supernatural in his life? A problem of such magnitude, involving such a radical mental and spiritual revolution, has rarely been presented for solution

to the human mind. He retired to Arabia and looked the questions involved squarely in the face, open to the inspiration of heaven.

We can only trace the evolution of Paul's mental world as he has unconsciously recorded it in the letters and labors of his later life. Systematic theology is the last thing to look for in Paul's writings. If he could be personally charged with the Pauline theology to-day he would be astounded, and, when he got his breath, would certainly plead, "Not guilty." He lived in a period of transition, and built a bridge of life, rather than of dogma, between the old and the new. The truth which grew out of his life came to him through a series of mental and spiritual wrestlings reaching from Damascus to Rome,—which, after all, is the way of God's perpetual method of inspiration.

Paul's earliest solution of the question was perfectly natural, and almost inevitable. He clung to the old faith, and simply pushed the expected glorious Advent forward a little, to an unknown day, but within the term of his own generation. The first Advent had been humble—perplexingly so—but the Second would be with great power and glory. He commends the Thessalonians for their staunchness, and urges them to abound in love, that they may be found unblamable in holiness at the Parousia shortly to be manifested. They are to be quiet; mind their own business; walk honestly in view of the coming event. They should waste no regrets that those who have fallen asleep will miss the glorious triumph, for when the Lord comes he will bring the faithful with him, so that the living shall have no precedence over the dead, but both alike shall share the glory. This earliest setting of Paul's Second Advent is in the terms of the letter and spirit of the current Jewish faith. The Lord shall come from heaven with

a great shout, attended by the shining hierarchy, with blazon of trumpets, and the living and dead saints shall be caught up to meet him in the air. It should be noticed that Paul nowhere lends the weight of his name to the idea of a millennial reign. Inasmuch as that was indefinite in the Jewish traditions, he does not mention it.

The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written to supplement Paul's earlier teaching, and to correct certain wrong impressions and evil effects growing, naturally enough, out of their acceptance of Paul's doctrine of the immediate Parousia. If the day of their emancipation were so near, why should they continue the slaves of toil? They would rest, and feast, and watch for his coming. And so the doctrine that Paul meant to be a spur to holy living, a lever to righteousness, wrought disorder among the brethren—a disorder that has been repeated in the history of the church whenever the millennial-advent doctrine has gained any considerable hold upon the imagination of men. Paul tells them the Parousia is not so immediate as they had supposed, but is still immediate. The afflictors of the brotherhood shall receive retribution, and the afflicted shall find rest in that fiery day. The Lord shall slay the Lawless One with the breath of his mouth—a distinctly Jewish and unchristian conception of Messianic power, and one which Jesus repudiated when upon earth. The lazy and disorderly are enjoined to labor, and all are to watch hopefully for the day of deliverance not far distant.

These earliest of Paul's extant letters reveal the motive by which at first Paul hoped to move the world to righteousness. Men were to become holy in order to be ready for the reign of Messiah. It was almost John the Baptist's great cry, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But it is a kingdom that comes with observation, in which the simile of

the leaven has no place. It overturns the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, and overlooks the aptness and power of the spiritual life to reform and redeem the world. It is just such a conception of religion as we might expect from one emerging from the school of the Rabbis, and feeling his way among the things of the new order. In no other of his Epistles does this doctrine hold aught but a subordinate place. Perhaps it was the misuse of the doctrine at Thessalonica that led Paul to abandon it as a means of stirring men's consciences to a sane, practical religious life. Perhaps it was because a newer and larger world was orbiting upon his vision. Probably it was a natural combination of both of these reasons. His later teaching was certainly the servant of a much larger vision.

Constant thinking upon the problems of religion drove Paul ever back upon the old prophets' conception of the Suffering-Saviour-Messiah. "For I determined to know nothing among you," he writes to the church at Corinth, "save Jesus Christ, and *him crucified.*" He realizes that the apocalyptic Parousia has failed to produce the type of religion that satisfies his vision of life, and so feels for a higher motive. Ever after, the *suffering* Redeemer is central in his preaching. Henceforth he is conscious of a great mission looking towards the slow, orderly redemption of men's nature by means of the dynamical spiritual life. He deals with the perpetual struggle between the spirit and the flesh. The crucifixion is central in his thought as a great sacrifice and example. Men are to live the life of faith apart from Law, Temple, and Priest, as Abraham did before these candidates for men's allegiance appeared. By the Holy Spirit, God himself dwells near man in all the phases of his life. An intelligent witness of the spirit of man within to the spirit of God without, constitutes the true religious life. The new church is the body of Christ,

to see, to think, to act for him in the world, incarnating among men his altruistic spirit. Even when Paul deals with matters eschatological, the apocalyptic features of Thessalonians are later replaced by saner and more spiritual conceptions. The resurrection is of a spiritual body. In his last charge to Timothy he seems to have come to an almost purely spiritual conception of the Parousia. It is hardly probable that he ever consciously discarded his earlier conception of the Advent. Casual references to the question seem to reveal the old idea at the base of his thought. But his larger message relegated it more and more to the region of his subconsciousness. His later preaching was of a spiritual kingdom, of a religious life in man consonant with the Sermon on the Mount, which made the apocalyptic Parousia, hidden away among the prejudices of his earlier life, an anachronism, if it did not negative it altogether. He was too busy and too strong a man to weaken his onslaught on the world by seeking the intellectual consistency which gives such abiding satisfaction to smaller and less original men. In strenuous pursuit of his goal he did not consider for a moment the possibility of carrying with him, or of caring for, the things he passed on the way. It was his characteristic to ever be forgetting the things which were behind, as, indeed, it is of all great men.

What did Jesus teach about the Parousia? From the Greek fathers to our own day, it has been the fashion and folly of theology to interpret Jesus by Paul. Paul is a much more important figure in the theological world to-day than is Jesus, though the tide is certainly turning. Now, Jesus' eschatological discourses have been gathered from scattered sayings throughout his ministry, and edited by men completely possessed by the materialistic and apocalyptic conceptions of

the Messiah. Therefore their interpretation is not an easy matter. Some things, however, stand out clearly. Jesus' ministry was a vigorous protest against those conceptions of his kingdom which form the base of the traditional doctrine of the Second Advent. He yielded not one jot to cataclysmic notions of the kingdom. His teaching is moral, ethical, spiritual, looking towards the slow, orderly, moral redemption of the world which has, as a matter of fact, operated through the intervening centuries. The "sign" he delighted in was that of his own unmiraculous preaching to and fro in the land, persuading men to the spiritual life. Because he would not be such a Messiah as modern premillennialists expect, the Jews put him to death. A more solemn and final protest against current conceptions of the Second Advent it would be impossible for him to have given. His whole teaching and life, and death, cry out against the apocalyptical expectations of men who profess to believe in his teachings, and life, and death!

The Gospels record two distinct conceptions of the Parousia. In the Synoptics, written early, before men had comprehended the spiritual significance of the discourses they record, the record of the eschatological discourses of Jesus shows the Parousia more or less apocalyptic, and in accord with the expectations of the age. The Fourth Gospel's corresponding record is spiritual, natural, and consonant with universal religious experience. Jesus will come again immediately and receive his disciples unto himself, even as he comes to-day to every spiritually-minded man. Even the resurrection is from a life of sin to a spiritual life, through vital union with Christ. The center of interest is not the cataclysmic appearing of the Lord at the imminent consummation of the world, but the quiet advent of the Paraclete whose Parousia is to be per-

manent in the church. Which of these two conceptions—the one essentially carnal, the other finely spiritual—represents more faithfully the mind of the Master? As the Parousia of the Fourth Gospel is in full accord with the spirit of Jesus' teaching about the nature of the kingdom, and is part of the well-tested experience of the church, there can be little doubt that it more faithfully preserves the spirit of his teaching, and that his Parousia was to be the Presence of the Paraclete through the Christian ages.

One significant item has been uniformly overlooked or explained away by the premillennial Adventists. In the most pointed of Jesus' discourses on Last Things, he himself says, "This generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished." This, it would seem, ought to be conclusive. But for Matthew xxiv. 14, and Mark xiii. 10, all the Advental items recorded in these two Gospels fall within "this generation." These passages really form no exception. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations." The question hangs upon the meaning of "the whole world" and "all the nations." The passages are evidently equivalent to Acts i. 8, "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Manifestly those to whom he spake never were his witnesses to "the uttermost parts of the earth," as we know the earth. Are not these passages simply the foregleam of the truth that the church would break away from Judaism into the environing Gentile lands? Is it not simply equivalent to saying that when the message shall have swung out to centers independent of Jerusalem, then shall come the end in question? A person studying the passages for the first time, free from bias, would, I think, so interpret them. This at least accords

with Jesus' other saying, "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come," i.e., the Son of Man shall come very quickly. Either Jesus was mistaken, or the premillennialists are wrong in their expectations.

What is the reasonable explanation of Jesus' discourses on the Parousia in the Synoptics? It is clear that, as always, he used the current conceptions to convey his higher truths. Two immediate things were in his prevision. He foresaw the impending destruction of Jerusalem, which brought to an end the Jewish nation. There is no real controversy about the fact that this approaching calamity was omnipresent in Jesus' mind, and shaped his eschatological discourses. The canonical Old Testament conception of Messiah involved a "Day of the Lord," in which condign punishment would fall upon the unfaithful nation. Jesus was the Messiah of that type, and proclaimed himself Judge in this approaching Day of the Lord. In that great visitation the Son of Man did pass judgment upon Israel, its effete religion, its proud Phariseeism, and upon its foolish Messianic dreams. The major part of Jesus' discourses upon Last Things is completely and consistently interpreted through the impending destruction of the City.

The logical sequence of this Day of the Lord was the end of the Temple dispensation and the beginning of the reign of the spiritual life in the world. It was the end of an Age in the history of religion. Cognate with the end of the age in Jesus' mind, arose the far-off vision of the end of the world,—the grand mysterious consummation toward which the ages tend. He saw this far-off event, and his speech about the end of the Jewish age is shot through and through with light from the final judgment-throne, as the scene lay in his prevision. It *we*,

lacking the strong prejudices of his auditors, could have heard him speak, much that is now confused and uncertain would doubtless be clear and easy to understand. As it is, there is no hint of a premillennial reign. He simply and sublimely claims the arbitership of the eternal destiny of men, and of nations, at the final consummation. His language is highly oriental, pictorial, metaphorical. Reduced to Western terms, it simply and grandly means that the Son of Man, rejected of the nation upon the eve of its own doom, would still sit in judgment upon the nation in the day of its calamity, and even so will be the Judge of all the earth at the far-off climax of the world, whatever, wherever, and whenever that event may prove to be.

But the Fourth Gospel undoubtedly represents the view of the Parousia nearest Jesus' heart. Liddell and Scott define the word "Parousia" as, "A being present, presence; the being present to assist." The secondary sense is "arrival": the primary is "presence." The theologians are responsible for the changing of "Presence" to "Advent." "Lo, I am with you alway, even until the end of the age," recorded in the Synoptics, seems to be the sense in which Jesus meant the Parousia to be understood. The Paraclete in John's Gospel overshadows, if it does not entirely displace, the Parousia, and seems to be the true interpretation of it. It is a presence that is to abide, not for a thousand years of doubtful glory, but always. The spiritual presence of Jesus, moving upon the world of men, has wrought our Christian civilization, and has in it largest prophecy for the world's future. Already it has wrought a millennium in human society. It is the true fulfillment of the Old Testament conception, of the Sermon on the Mount, of Paul's later profound philosophy of the religious life, and of the noblest instincts of the Christian church. What are all

the species of "Millerism" that have befooled and befogged large sections of the church through the Christian ages, compared with the quiet, rational, operations of this spiritual Parousia "within" man and the church? No spectacular Advent could be half so dynamic; no bodily Presence half so helpful. To turn from it to the Jewish type is to turn from the spiritual to the carnal. The current conception is puerile, gaudy, and appeals mainly to the childish love of wonder incident to half-awakened man,—to those fundamental instincts in the race which make the bass drum the chief instrument in the band. Look not for his coming in the clouds when men exclaim, Lo! here, lo! there, for the kingdom of *heaven* cometh not in that wise—it is within you.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Simply this: That Jesus founded a spiritual kingdom, of which the Paraclete is the highest conception,—God with man, helping, lifting, blessing, unfolding his higher destiny. That the congenital prejudices of the disciples and apostles naturally led them to misunderstand and misinterpret much of Jesus' discourses upon "Last Things." That Paul, dominated by the current conceptions of the Messiah, and believing Jesus to be the Messiah, simply postponed, in his earlier writings, the popularly expected Advent into the immediate future, and, with the other apostles, daily expected the august event. That his later insight into the spiritual led him to know no more this Christ after the flesh, but to preach a religion ethical and spiritual, which eventually pushed out of sight his earlier conceptions of the Second Advent. That the teaching of Jesus on the Parousia is fulfilled in his speedy coming in judgment upon the nation at the fall of Jerusalem, and at the end of the temple dispensation, and in his final judgment of the world

at the great consummation. That Jesus nowhere teaches a millennial reign, to precede the grand wind-up of the world. That the reasonable doctrine of the Paraclete seems to embody Jesus' personal views of the Parousia, which term simply means a *Presence* rather than an *Advent*,—a Presence that abides among men forever—a Shekinah that goeth not out—an incarnation whose object is to make man divine—that the whole of Jesus' life, and the spirit of his teaching, was an emphatic protest against the conceptions of the nature of the kingdom which lie at the base of the traditional doctrine of the Second Advent.

And what shall the far-off end be? Of that no man knoweth, and science, poetry, and theology can only dream. Jesus declared he did not know. It were wise of the church to stand by the sober, reasonable, experimental truths she certainly knows. Speed then in the church, and in the wide world, the Parousia of the Spirit, and let the thaumaturgical Advent fade from the vital interest of man.