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## The Rev. S. Runsie Craig Memorial, 1941.

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In accordance with the terms of the Trust, the Council have selected for the 1941 Memorial the Paper on "Divine Intervention in Historic Fact and Prophetic Anticipation," presented to the Society on February 3rd, 1941, by the Rev. W. S. Hooton, M.A., B.D., as affording strong confirmation of the genuineness of the "Faith once delivered to the Saints."

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War conditions having rendered it impracticable to hold an ordinary meeting on February 3rd, 1941, the Paper appointed to be read on that date was circulated to subscribers and is here published, together with the written discussion elicited.

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### *DIVINE INTERVENTION : IN HISTORIC FACT AND PROPHETIC ANTICIPATION.*

By THE REV. W. S. HOOTON, M.A., B.D.

#### HOW IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO COME ?

THIS question, a challenging one at all times, has become tenfold more so through the events of recent years. Far from advancing to a golden age, the world has seemed to be galloping to ruin. Hopes based upon the spread of education and the progress of science have been proved to be delusive; science itself has been turned to wicked, inhuman ends. Theories looking for the triumph of a leavening Christian influence have met with a startling set-back in the reversion to paganism and atheism which casts a dark cloud over Europe to-day. It is not to be denied that the teaching of Christ our Lord has had powerful effect in raising the standard of human ideals throughout the centuries, nor must we for a moment ignore the fact that the Spirit of God is still mightily working, amid all the turmoil; but a challenge has been offered by the powers of darkness which is almost unprecedented in violence, and altogether unequalled in its world-wide extent.

Can any inferences be drawn, from the past ages of the world's history, as to the way in which the wisdom and power of God deal with the affairs of men—inferences leading to a reasonable forecast as to the likely future of this harassed world ?

#### PAST STAGES OF HUMAN HISTORY.

Those who have hitherto neglected or even questioned the evidence of the Biblical records and pronouncements are probably, in many cases, now wondering whether the astounding developments seen in current events call for more careful attention to what Scripture has to say of past human history, and what it foreshadows in the future. It is to Scripture alone that we owe any knowledge we possess as to the earliest ages of mankind ; and, for this and other reasons, it is from Scripture alone that we can gather a solid basis for a philosophy of history.

It tells of a series of historical stages, *marked by acts of divine intervention*. Man was put on his trial in various ways ; and every time there was manifested a fatal drift away from God and from right living. History demonstrates the impossibility of recovering lost direction and forfeited standing, apart from God, and faith in Him.

Thus, the universal corruption of primeval times led to the universal judgment of the Flood—an act of divine intervention ; not merely, indeed, in judgment, but also in mercy. Humanity was provided with a fresh start, in an earth cleansed of intolerable wickedness. But the fatal taint breaks out again ; and further intervention follows, in the scattering of the nations at Babel—this also being an act of judgment with a merciful purpose in view.

God again intervened in the choice of Abraham, as the head of a race which should represent Him, and His truth, and His laws, among men. But open manifestations of the rebellious spirit proved, again and again, in the history of that very race, that evil is ingrained even in those most favoured by spiritual privileges and spiritual light. The dispersion of the race, and their partial return, led to no radical change ; nay, there followed a fearful culmination of iniquity and apostasy, in the worst crime of history, the rejection and crucifixion of the King and Redeemer Himself.

But here comes the greatest of all examples of Divine intervention. That awful crime was itself overruled, by the mighty

power of God, for the actual fulfilment of the purpose of redemption, in preparation for the Kingdom. The Cross was the preliminary to the opening of the most enlightened dispensation of all hitherto experienced. The bright light of Pentecost provided for humanity the most glorious of all its opportunities. But how does the world stand now, after nearly two thousand years of this exalted privilege? Far be it from us to underrate the real triumphs of the Redeemer in every land, or even the more general influence of Christian ideals. But what is the true position, either in the world at large or (alas!) within the visible Church itself, after these many centuries of the most favourable conditions possible within the limits of human freewill? The events of the past two or three decades have revealed the complete bankruptcy of human efforts at world-governance. The fearful disclosures of human depravity in the present world-crisis have shown afresh the inescapable reality of that depravity. The gigantic tasks which will await treatment after the power of our enemies shall, by the grace of God, have been broken, and after any further complications—which seem only too likely—have been met, will certainly prove too much for human skill and wisdom. “Who is sufficient for these things?” The only hope for mankind is *that God should intervene again*. For “our sufficiency is of God,” and of Him alone.

#### HUMAN NEED AND DIVINE MERCY.

We see, then, that under every kind of test to which man has been put, he has failed; and we turn to enquire as to *the origin of the trouble*, and to discover *the principles of Divine intervention*. The hinge of the Bible comes very near its beginning. There is nothing surprising in this; it is the same with the hinge of a gate. And everything “turns upon” the hinge! Man, as created, was in all respects “very good.” His moral condition was one of innocence, with capacity for full development, and with the quality of free will—a priceless gift. But man took the wrong path. The tragedy of the Fall altered everything; and the whole of Scripture which follows the account of it in Genesis iii is a revelation and a record of the way in which the mercy and justice of God dealt with the altered situation, with a view to redemption, restoration, and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus the whole of the

revelation "turns upon" the Fall. Here is the explanation of the ingrained tendency which has produced consistently dire results. But just here comes what we might at the outset with logical accuracy have described as the first Divine intervention, in the promise of the woman's Seed who was to bruise the serpent's head. We have already said that the *fulfilment* of this promise constituted the greatest of all examples of such intervention. In it is the very heart of the revelation of the ways of God with men. While the Fall is the *hinge* of that revelation, Calvary and the Resurrection are its *centre*.

As we review those past stages of world-history, what can be gathered with regard to *the reasons which call for the direct intervention of God*? Three such reasons have been suggested; and they appear to cover all the cases which we have recalled. It would seem that He intervenes (a) when a state of affairs has arisen which might frustrate His purposes if not corrected; (b) when corruption reaches a stage beyond the power of man to cope with it (c) when the possibility of godly living for future generations is menaced. Every one of the above examples comes under one or more of these heads.

#### THE PRESENT NEED, AND THE REMEDY.

How far does the present situation correspond to such conditions? Christianity, indeed, is still, as ever, the saving salt of the earth. But the Christian message, always widely rejected or neglected, is now confronted by special attacks, and in particular by vast world-movements absolutely incompatible with its essence. Meanwhile, the increase of knowledge—divorced from a supply of Divine wisdom—has tended to pride in the imagined sufficiency of human resources, and has even been perverted to the invention of diabolical devices for human destruction. Forces inspired from hell are bent upon frustrating the purposes of God, and bid fair, if unchecked, to render godliness in future generations impossible. And human statesmanship, for all its striving, has been powerless to cope with the growing power of evil. No remedy is within sight. But the Word of God shows us where to look for it.

*The resources of God* are not exhausted. We have not yet reached the final stages of Divine intervention that are revealed in the Scriptures. It is not for us to say exactly when the time

for them will arrive. But the fact of decisive coming action by the direct intervention of God is as plainly declared as any other fact. It is this, which will introduce the world-wide establishment of His Kingdom that is guaranteed by the promises of Holy Writ. Divine intervention is the one sure hope of the Church, and for the world—Divine intervention, with Divine governance to follow.

The Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is as clearly foretold as was His First Coming. The prophecies with regard to that First Coming were fulfilled with a literal and wondrously detailed exactness, familiar to all Bible students. Why should anyone doubt that those which foretell His Return will be fulfilled with equal literalness ?

It is not true to say, as is sometimes said, that the subject is shrouded in obscurity. Confusion has been introduced by the unwise handling of some controversialists, but the main outlines of the revelation are as clear as daylight, and, in actual reality, are agreed upon by all who accept its plain teaching, whatever differences there may be on points of detailed interpretation. Let us try to summarise the main facts. Scripture references which either declare or imply them are, in most cases, very numerous ; we can, of course, only quote a limited number here.

1. *The Lord Himself is coming back in personal and visible reality.* "Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."<sup>1</sup>

2. *His Coming will be at a time of world unrest and terror.* "Upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows ; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world ; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."<sup>2</sup>

3. *The world will be as preoccupied with its own affairs, as in the days of Divine visitations long ago.* "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage . . . They ate, they drunk, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxi, 27 ; Acts i, 11, Cp., e.g., 1 Thess. iv, 16. Rev. i, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxi, 25, 26 (R.V.).

<sup>3</sup> Luke xvii, 26-30.

Observe the remarkable suggestiveness of the wording.<sup>1</sup> Those referred to (in the days of Noah and Lot) are among the most appalling examples of human corruption. Yet our Lord does not seem definitely to select their gross iniquities for reference, but their complete obsession with secular pursuits, not in themselves unlawful. And is not that precisely the primary sin of our own day?—*leaving God out.*

4. *The Advent of the Lord will be unexpected*—certainly by the world; there are solemn suggestions that it may take by surprise even many Christians. “Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”<sup>2</sup>

5. *His Coming will be as sudden as it will be unexpected.* There will be no silent, unrecognised approach, as there was in the case of the first Advent. “As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the Coming of the Son of Man be.” “Watch ye therefore . . . lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping.”<sup>3</sup>

6. *The day and hour of His appearing are known to no one* “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven.” “Ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning.”<sup>4</sup>

7. *He is coming to receive and to transfigure His own people.* “I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” “The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” “Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we await as Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself.”<sup>5</sup>

8. *He will require of all an account* “We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he

<sup>1</sup> Similarly in Matt. xxiv, 37, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiv, 44; Cp. 2 Pet. iii, 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxiv, 27; Mark xiii, 35, 36; cp. 1 Cor. xv, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxiv, 36; Mark xiii, 35.

<sup>5</sup> John xiv, 3, R.V.; 1 Thess. iv, 16–18 (cp. 2 Thess. ii, 1); Phil. iii, 20, 21. cp. Titus ii, 13.

hath done, whether it be good or bad." "This is He which is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead."<sup>1</sup>

9. *He is coming to right all wrongs.* "The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father."<sup>2</sup>

10. *He will set up a Kingdom which will never be overthrown.* "His appearing and His Kingdom." "The Kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."<sup>3</sup>

Here, then, are at least ten clear and positive facts of Divine revelation, regarding the Coming and Kingdom of the returning Christ.

#### SCEPTICISM—AND CONTROVERSIES.

It is, of course, widely known that the literal interpretation of His Coming has been challenged; also that considerable discussion and controversy (in matters of detail only) has arisen between the chief schools of interpretation. Something must be said on both these matters.

It would carry us too far to deal here with the most objectionable form of the challenge—that which questions the Scripture record. But a different line is adopted by those who suggest that the promises were fulfilled in the Coming of the Holy Spirit, and must be understood in an entirely spiritual sense. Anyone who will glance over the passages we have quoted (and there are many like them) will scarcely think this a natural explanation; but as St. John himself has been claimed as an exponent of the view (writing after early hopes of the Lord's personal Return had not yet been fulfilled), a little more must be said about it.

Surely, here is strange exegesis! It is certainly St. John who records in special fulness our Lord's promises of the Holy Spirit's Coming. But consider these words, in the very context—"I go to prepare a place for you;" and further, "I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 10; Acts x, 42, R.V.; cp. Rom. xiv, 10-12; Matt. xxv. 14-33.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiii, 41-43, R.V.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. iv, 1; Rev. xi, 15-18, R.V.; cp. 1 Cor. xv, 25; Rev. xix, 11-16.

be also."<sup>1</sup> The first words, "I come again," may indeed *include* the spiritual coming, especially as the tense is present, and the same discourse speaks of the Father and the Son "coming" to the believer who proves his love by his obedience.<sup>2</sup> But it is incredible that the rest of the promise should have this meaning alone; obviously it could have no full explanation apart from a literal Return to "receive them" to the "prepared place." And (especially in view of this) it is only reasonable to conclude that the words "I come again" must themselves find their final and most perfect fulfilment in a literal Return.

Almost more extraordinary does the proposed exegesis appear, when it is remembered that the very same discourse consistently represents the Holy Spirit as "another" Comforter, thus distinguishing Him from the Lord Himself, who is speaking.<sup>3</sup> Again, it is St. John's Gospel which has the further saying, "If I will that he tarry *till I come*";<sup>4</sup> it is St. John who, in his First Epistle, speaks as plainly as anyone of the *Parousia* of the Lord.<sup>5</sup> A strange witness, surely, to call in evidence for an unnatural and evasive theory!

Some, again, have held that the Lord fulfils his promise by coming to His believing people at death. But in one of the fullest revelations about the Second Coming a distinction is made between dying and being received at His Return.<sup>6</sup> Nor can the promise have been fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem. For some of the Biblical references to the Second Advent were written after that event.

The long delay (according to our estimates) is the subject of explanation by St. Peter. Human measurements of time have no comparison with the Divine estimates; what, indeed, are centuries, or even millenniums, when set over against eternity? And especially, the delay is the expression of His longsuffering mercy and concern for men's souls.<sup>7</sup>

#### DIVERSE INTERPRETATIONS.

With regard to discussions and controversies—the second of the two subjects mentioned at the beginning of the preceding

<sup>1</sup> John xiv, 2, 3, R.V.

<sup>2</sup> John xiv, 23.

<sup>3</sup> John xiv, 16, 26; xv, 26; xvi, 7, 13, 14, 15; cp. Acts ii, 33.

<sup>4</sup> John xxi, 22.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John ii, 28.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Thess. iv, 16, 17.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Peter iii, 8–15.

section—not much need be said on this occasion. It is not our present purpose to discuss different schools of interpretation, but to set forth the salient facts of prophecy concerning the promised Return of our Lord and His coming Kingdom—the greatly needed and clearly foretold *Divine intervention*.

Yet, inasmuch as these differences of view have given rise to much unhappy controversy, which has—without reason, indeed, but in regrettable fact—discredited the subject in the eyes of many, it is important to call attention to the leading considerations which govern this aspect of the matter.

First, as has already been mentioned, these controversies do not affect the *facts*, but only the manner in which the foretold events will be fulfilled, and the order of their development. And besides this, none but the last four of our ten points can be held to be affected even to this extent.

Further, it is of the highest importance to remember that our Lord's Return is not the only Christian doctrine which the Enemy of souls has made the subject of confusing and unedifying controversy. Every one of the chief credal truths has suffered in the same way; yet no-one pleads that *these* should be ignored! It is only when the Second Advent is mentioned that the plea is raised that the topic is confused and controversial. How unreasonable, when this is as plainly revealed as anything else! Whatever may be said about the absurdity of extreme insistence upon disputed points of detailed interpretation, any such absurdity is capped by this extraordinary excuse for neglecting an essential part of Christian truth.

Incidentally, it may be pointed out that the very existence of these diversities of interpretation on points of detail, between equally devout and true Bible students who are agreed on the main facts, should make everyone wary of adopting an attitude of undue dogmatism regarding such details. And, above all, it should rule out any uncharitable erection of a particular view of them into a standard and test of orthodoxy.

One favourite excuse for avoiding the subject is the falsification of confidently predicted dates for the Second Advent. But it must in all fairness be acknowledged that date-fixing has fallen into disrepute among students. It is not reasonable to pour scorn upon a method so generally abandoned. And it is the height of folly to remain aloof, refusing to face a large part of Divine revelation, on so inadequate a plea.

## THE COMING KINGDOM.

There is, however, *one* of the four points referred to as affected by diverse interpretations, which demands some special reference, because it closely touches our main topic of Divine intervention and the coming Kingdom.

It is a revealed fact that our Lord will set up a Kingdom which will never be overthrown. But will it include a reign *on earth* of righteousness and peace? In other words, are we to look for a literal millennium?

Many among us do think that Scripture points to such a coming reign. The "thousand years" of Rev. xx. 2-7 might, indeed, be as symbolical as so much else in that wonderful Book. But that is not the point. It has to be recognised that other passages, by no means so likely to be symbolical, appear to indicate a literal earthly reign. And, in particular, the positive notes of time in that particular passage seem to have no meaning apart from an earthly reign—the double reference "*until* the thousand years should be finished"; the phrase "*after that*"; and the fact that during the period indicated (whatever its exact length, literal or symbolical) Satan should "*deceive the nations no more.*" At all events, the present is the last of all times concerning which that could be said!<sup>1</sup>

But let it be supposed, for the sake of argument, that the promised Kingdom is to be entirely spiritual, and that all passages referring to it are designedly symbolical. That would not diminish the importance of the matter. In one way or another, the vindication of our Lord will be made unchallengeably manifest to all created existences. To Him, every knee shall bow.<sup>2</sup> By His visible and acknowledged victory, the results of the Fall will be more than nullified; a creation in bondage will be set free, once for all, and irreversibly; redemption, already won, will be brought to its full fruition.<sup>3</sup>

This is an essential part of the Christian Faith and the Christian message. Obviously, it is its culmination. And what will be the decisive means of its accomplishment? Holy Scripture leaves us in no uncertainty. *It is the Second Coming of our Lord, the Redeemer, in a mighty act of Divine intervention. Redemption, won on the Cross, guaranteed by the Resurrection,*

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xx, 1-7, especially 3, 5, 7; cp., e.g., Psa. lxxii and Isa. xi, 4-10.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii, 18-23; Matt. xiii, 41.

will be completed at the Return. Scripture does not foreshadow a gradually improved world ultimately acknowledging its King; it tells of a world in itself hopelessly tainted and helplessly corrupt, of humanity finally proved bankrupt after the most favourable test; yet, in the abounding mercy of God, and on the sure guarantee of His inviolable promise, to be cleansed of "all things that offend," and gloriously delivered, through *His own decisive act of saving intervention*. Whether the Kingdom be earthly or not, it is *His intervention* that will establish it.

#### A MESSAGE FOR THE TIMES.

Here is a message for the times. Indeed, it might be said, *the message for the times*, with uniquely special appeal in the amazing conditions of our own day. That it should be scoffed at by the sceptic was foretold<sup>1</sup> (incidentally, this remarkably testifies to the inspiration of Scripture so long ago); but that it should be overlaid and ignored just when it is most needed is a tragedy indeed.

Think of the effect it would have, through the power of God, upon men and women asleep in indifference, numbed by scepticism, or halting between two opinions. Think of the ensuing awakening, among lukewarm Christians, to personal witness and sacrificial gifts in their Master's cause. Think, again, of the relief to earnest souls, saddened by the woes of the Church and of the world.

It is sometimes supposed that the study of prophecy is unpractical. Why, it is one of the most practical of all! In the teaching of our Lord and His apostles, it is ever linked with the call to watchful readiness, holy living, zealous service.<sup>2</sup> So far from leaving us "in the clouds," this subject brings us face to face with the hard facts of earth, while it calls us to abandon idle dreams of humanly organized improvement, and the "wishful thinking" which has marred so much in the Church's earnest efforts.

And can it come to pass in our own time? Why not? Date-fixing is folly, or worse; but our Lord did give *general signs*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. iii, 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiv, 42-xxv, 30; Rom. xiii, 11-14; 2 Pet. iii, 11-14; 1 John ii, 28, iii, 3, R.V.

by which the approach of the great Day might be anticipated. And as He blamed His own generation for not discerning the signs of His First Advent, He is not likely to commend us if we refuse to ponder the signs of His Second Coming. Certainly, there never has been a time which looked *so much* like the period that He and His followers thus foretold.<sup>1</sup> What shall we say, if He should return and demand *our* account for never witnessing of all this to a dallying Church and a heedless world—perhaps even for never heeding it ourselves ?

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Luke xxi, 25-28.

#### DISCUSSION.

Rev. Principal H. S. CURR wrote : On the general principle which underlies Mr. Hooton's admirable paper there can surely be no room for dispute. It is a matter of general agreement amongst philosophical historians that nations can only be quickened by the incursion of some external influence. A people cannot lift itself by its own waistbelt any more than an individual. Thus the East slumbered until it was brought into vitalizing contact with the West. The American continent remained in a state of stagnation until settlers from Europe landed on its shores. What is true of the effect of nations upon each other, applies with equal force to Divine intervention. It is the only way whereby the human race can be rescued from decline and decay and made to walk in newness of life.

The First Advent of Our Lord is the proof. The world of that day had come to the end of itself. It was plunged in despair. But man's extremity proved to be God's opportunity, and by means of the Incarnation and Passion of the Son of God man received a new and glorious lease of life. The centuries which have passed since the beginning of the Christian era have no parallel in the world's history for progress of every kind, spiritual, mental, and material, that being due to God's act in sending His Son in the likeness of sinful man that He might do for the children of men what they could never by any chance do for themselves.

The Second Advent of Christ is necessary on the same grounds, unless it can be proved that the First Advent of Our Lord has been adequate for all that may be required. Will mankind now be able

to work out its own salvation without further intervention on the part of God ? The clear and explicit teaching of the Bible forbids such a hypothesis. Both the Old and New Testaments make it plain that Christ must return to reign upon the earth before evil will be fully and finally overcome by good. But may it not be argued that the Old Testament Dispensation makes that probable, and even certain, by analogy ? Between these world events the Flood and the Cross the chosen people enjoyed Divine guidance and blessing in remarkable measure, but they proved to be insufficient. God Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets was constrained in the fulness of time to speak unto men in His Son. He could do none other, for all the expedients tried had proved to be failures. My contention is that, just as man failed to conquer his spiritual foes until there came a Second Adam to the fight, despite all the instances of Divine intervention which the race has received, so he will fail again, despite the immeasurably superior resources to which he has access in Christ. The reason lies in the strength of sin. Nothing but the Second Advent of Our Lord will vanquish it for ever. The Kingdom of God will never come on earth as it is in heaven until its King should first come in great power and glory. History has got a way of repeating itself, and that applies to the history of redemption. The combination of causes which made the First Advent imperative will make the Second an equally clamant necessity.

Mr. G. A. HEATH wrote : Mr. Hooton's very important paper is most refreshing reading. It seems to me to be exactly the right kind of teaching to counter the prevailing, appalling, but pleasant error, described in the paper as "dreams of humanly organised improvement." On every hand, from pulpit, platform and religious periodical, comes a flood of this "wishful thinking." *We*, the self-sufficient *we* ; we men of good-will are after the war going to bring in the Kingdom of God by *our* efforts ; missionary, educational, cultural and what not !

Mr. Hooton skilfully leads us to the Scriptures and suggests that God summed up man as an impossibility away back in Genesis vi. He reminds us that Scripture is almost vocal in insisting that only through the *personal* intervention of Christ, the One "in whom all

things subsist," can peace, order and righteousness have sway in the earth—and these things shall be—in God's due time.

I am glad Mr. Hooton has called attention to the unwisdom of fixing dates. God's mercy allows postponements, and yet there is no delay to His appointments. In Gen. vi, He says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" then mercy says "Yet his days shall be 120 years"; and after that time of long-suffering, only eight entered the ark!

To Nineveh of old came the message "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." But the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah and the 40 days stretched out 170 years.

When Christ came there was the wonderful incident of the comma (Luke iv, 16-19). He deliberately paused at a comma, when quoting the prophecy, the fulfilment of which *He was*; and that comma has become 2,000 years of Mercy—yet the prophesied judgment must come. Because of these hiatuses which are so frequent in God's dealing with Man it is impossible to foretell the moment of His coming, even though the signs abound. Let us remember too, that although the believer has the sure hope of the wonderful consummation of reaching his Lord's presence by transformation, rapture, or resurrection, yet the World itself is preparing for the advent of the Antichrist who will undoubtedly precede the parousia of Christ. None of the many antichrists who have worked wickedly down the ages have reached the dimensions of the great and powerful personality who shall arrogate World-dominion and World-worship to himself, as limned in lurid outline in the Scriptures—a veritable masterpiece of Satan. Such are some of the *unpopular* facts to which one's thoughts are drawn by a perusal of this searching, timely paper. May the people of the Lord rise to their privileges and proclaim the truth.

Finally, I would like to commend the skill with which Mr. Hooton has avoided the controversies of various schools of interpretation, while sacrificing nothing of the truth of his main theme.

Colonel A. H. VAN STRAUBENZEE wrote: Having read the lecture, with great interest, I think its subject should be changed to—"The Kingdom of Christ on Earth." But before this comes, our present administration of Grace will be closed to be followed by a

short administration of Judgment before we enter Christ's millennial Kingdom on earth for 1,000 years.

Paul, as the pattern of a saved sinner under grace, teaches us that, if dead when the Body of Christ is completed, we shall be raised by an out-resurrection from the majority of the dead. If alive, we shall be called on high by translation, and in this manner shall we ever be with the Lord.

Mr. E. H. BETTS wrote : Mr. Hooton's paper is not only of great intrinsic interest but adumbrates a philosophy of divine intervention of the greatest attractiveness, the pursuit of which would be too lengthy for a mere discussion. I submit only the following remarks for Mr. Hooton's consideration.

The "three reasons which call for divine intervention" would seem to be applicable to a broader range of divine action than that which could be strictly styled direct personal intervention. An examination of divine "interventions" leads to the following rough classification :—

I. *God's inscrutable providential manipulation* of all things, good and evil, which constrains all things for good according to His purpose (Rom. viii, 28, with Eph. i, 11). This kind of action uses no "miraculous" means and yet is most miraculous in that it gives to events a direction that is totally contrary to the design of the evil beings, men or higher, who set them on foot. It is no "intervention" and yet surely prevents the frustration of God's purpose (reason (a)) and operates in a groaning creation where corruption (Rom. viii, 21) is surely beyond man's power to correct (reason (b)).

II. *More unusual action* involving (i) exceptional phenomena (*e.g.*, Writing on the Wall), (ii) common natural forces (*e.g.*, seismic or meteorological) operating in exceptional degree (*e.g.*, Deluge) coupled with a declaration through one of God's servants that the action is His and for what purpose He is acting (*e.g.*, Elijah's demonstration on Carmel (1 Kings xviii); denunciation of Belshazzar (Dan. v); the Deluge (Gen. x)). This class of action (which is doubtless capable of further sub-division) is hardly "intervention" in a sense comparable with that of the *epiphaneia* of Christ at the time of the destruction of the Man of Sin (2 Thess. ii, 8). It nevertheless

would seem to be covered by Mr. Hooton's condition (c) (maintenance of the possibility of godly living) in almost every case, and condition (b) (corruption beyond human power to control) in other cases. For instance, the possibility of godly living in the fear of Jehovah was preserved to the godly remnant by God's action through Elijah on Carmel ; and corruption had reached at the Flood a degree beyond the power of man to rectify.

III. *Direct, personal intervention* in government, grace or judgment. This took place *inter alia* in Eden (intervention in Government, Gen. iii, 8, *et seq.*) and at the first Advent (intervention in Grace) and is to recur (intervention in Judgment) when sin reaches its climax (2 Thess. ii, 8 and elsewhere). This type of intervention is thus characterized :—

- (1) It is direct (without employment of intermediary).
- (2) It is personal.
- (3) It inaugurates a new era and closes up an old one in the history of mankind in general.

A little examination will show that in Class III the three " reasons for intervention " come into force, and in the intervention in Judgment all three simultaneously and clamantly.

Now I submit that the reasons that call for the final direct personal intervention which is to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth in its fully public character are stated in Scripture to be :—

- (1) The banding of kings and rulers against God and Christ,
- (2) public rejection of God's restraint and God's authority, and
- (3) the recognition of a rival authority in the place of God and the worship of this substitute.

These are the long-known characteristics of the Great Apostasy (2 Thess. ii, 3, where in A.V. it is called the " falling away " ; Ps. ii, where it is described as the Great Rebellion against God and Christ). 2 Thess. ii, 3, informs us that the Day of the Lord (so read all the best editors) *cannot come until this apostasy first come* ; Ps. ii is even more definite in its time-note : " THEN shall He speak unto them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure." 2 Thess. ii, 7, 8, adds the information that the present secret working of iniquity is to be tolerated though restrained, but that when the Man of Sin is

*revealed*, the restraints having been removed, he is destroyed by the public appearing of Christ, being first consumed by the breath of His mouth and then annulled by the *epiphaneia* of His coming. The force of the passages seems to be clearly that only in the form of concerted and openly avowed rebellion against God is sin publicly dealt with by direct personal intervention of God (*sci* : in the person of the Son, Ps. ii).

I suggest that the relation between Mr. Hooton's "three reasons which call for divine intervention" and the three conditions stated above is that *the latter provide the conditions under which the former reach their universal final fulness of measure*. God is a God of measure (2 Cor. x, 13, Gen. xv, 16, Matt. xxiv, 32, etc.) The fullest possible measure of sin is filled up when men stage a world-wide, publicly proclaimed rebellion against God fully-revealed. Under such conditions Mr. Hooton's "three reasons" would be in full universal cry : not, as possibly now, merely forming the partial subject-matter of the Spirit's "intercession according to God" (Rom. viii, 26, 27) calling forth from Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will that miraculous though unseen co-ordination of all things (good and bad) for the *secret* forwarding of His purpose ; nor calling for a more direct judgment on individuals (Dan. v, 1 *et seq.*) or on men more generally when sinning against a God revealed less fully than under Christianity (Gen. vi, 9-13) ; nor invoking a drastic visitation of certain localities (Gen. xviii, 20 *et seq.*). On such occasions the measure of sin has been filled up individually, locally or temporarily. But here all three "reasons" work together crying out on (i) corruption to the full (2 Thess. ii, 9-12, and elsewhere), world-wide acceptance and worship of Satan's rival to God (Rev. xiii, 3, 4 and 7) leading to (ii) a threatened end of *all* godly living (Matt. xxiv, 22, Rev. xiii, 7) and thus (iii) entire frustration of God's purposes. *Then* shall the Lord appear in Person (*with His Saints, let us note well !*), and first consume and then annul him in whom all this full measure of evil is headed up : *then* shall the Kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever.

It further suggests itself that an illuminating study would be provided by a research into the extent and manner in which at

various interventions the measure of sin as represented by reasons (a), (b) and (c) has been filled up.

Major R. B. WITHERS wrote : One point in this paper strikes me as requiring special comment : the allusions to interpreting prophecies in a spiritual sense. I have never been able to get anybody who speaks in this way to give a clear definition of what the word "spiritual" means when used thus. It seems that "spiritual" is regarded loosely as the opposite of "literal," though it is never explained why literalness should be unspiritual.

Then, again, there is the supposition "that the promised Kingdom is to be entirely spiritual, and that all passages referring to it are designedly symbolical." It is a pity the author of the paper fails to make the point that this supposition simply equates "spiritual" to "unreal," to put it bluntly.

The antonym of "spiritual" is not "literal" or "real," or even "fleshly" or "physical," but simply "unspiritual." All true interpretation of Scripture is "spiritual" in the true sense, but that does not mean that it must not be literal, or that spiritual things are not absolutely real. Never was there a more pernicious practise than "spiritualising" Scripture in the sense of explaining it away, and only when we have collectively rid ourselves of this deadly spiritual poison will we come to any real agreement in the understanding of prophecy.

We have got to face the fact that we have no hope of making the study of prophecy "cut any ice" among ordinary people until we have come to a reasonable measure of agreement about it among ourselves. We are far, indeed, from this goal. The first paper this year, on the Daniel prophecies, makes our differences only too plain to those who know anything of the subject. There is hardly a single point of interpretation about these prophecies concerning which all competent translators and expositors are in complete agreement. Why is this ? I suggest two reasons. The first is that we are not agreed regarding the translations of the text, particularly the Hebrew text, of the relevant passages. The second is that we all, even the most enlightened of us, tend to "spiritualise" passages which do not harmonise with our preconceptions.

The golden rule for Scripture study is "Literal if possible." Very seldom is there any real difficulty in determining whether any statement is literal or figurative. The trouble is not so much that we cannot believe a statement in the Scriptures when we understand it, as that we do not understand it because we cannot divest ourselves of our preconceptions and prejudices about it. Here is where the use of several versions is so valuable in study, though even then translators too often write what they *think* a passage means instead of what it *says*—but that is another story.

J. J. BARCROFT ANDERSON wrote: "And shall be heralded this, the gospel of the Kingdom, in all the inhabited earth, for testimony to all the races, and then shall it come, the purposed-end," Matt. xxiv, 14.

"And from time the continual is caused-to-be-suppressed, and abominable Desolator tolerated, days thousand, two-hundred, and ninety" ( $3\frac{1}{2}$  years and 30 days). Blessed is he that is being restrained and being caused to reach to days, thousand, three hundred, thirty and five. And thou. Go to end. And thou shalt be resting. And thou shalt be standing-up. At thy appointed-place. The Right-hand side." Dan. xii, 11.

Immediately prior to the abomination that maketh desolate being set up, the record is: "And I will give to the two witnesses of me, and they shall prophesy days, thousand, two-hundred, sixty, wrapped in sackcloth. . . . And when they shall have accomplished the testimony of them, the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them . . . and kill them . . . and after the three days and a half, spirit of life out of God went into them." Rev. xi.

Prior to that period, Rev. xvii, 1-13, records the destruction of the "one" woman of Zechariah v, 7, after her wickedness had come to the full.

While the commanded blindness of Isaiah vi, 9, was operating upon the twelve tribes of Israel, but before the decreed desolations of Isaiah vi, 11, and of Daniel ix, 26 ("and at end fighting, decreed desolations"), Paul had a different hope. He then wrote: "The seen-things for appointed-times, but the not-seen-things eternal.

For we know that if the house of the tent of us on earth be destroyed, Built-house out of God have we, house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 Cor. v, 1.

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

Not a great deal seems to be called for in the way of reply to the kind comments upon the paper on "Divine Intervention in Historic Fact and Prophetic Anticipation." Most of the writers either amplify and illustrate special points, or enter briefly upon matters of detailed interpretation which are suitable for general consideration, but were of set purpose excluded from the paper itself for reasons then given; so that I shall doubtless be excused from entering upon them now.

Principal Curr's helpful contribution calls special attention to the great central example of Divine intervention, through "the Incarnation and Passion of the Son of God," amplifying the subject by some important considerations; and the other writers speak for the various points they deal with. Mr. E. H. Betts' very careful analysis in connection with the three reasons for Divine intervention which were mentioned gives me the opportunity to acknowledge that much in the earlier part of the paper is the fruit of suggestions received in the course of correspondence and criticisms from leading members of the Institute: it may be remembered that the three reasons themselves were definitely stated to have "been suggested."

With reference to Major Withers' criticism of the use of the word "spiritual" by contrast with "literal," in connection with the Coming of our Lord, or with the general interpretation of prophecies, it is perfectly true that what is "spiritual" is also in the truest sense "real" and "literal." No one would suggest, for example, that the spiritual Coming of our Lord to the believer is not also literally real. But I venture to suggest that two things need always to be borne in mind in our use of words: (1) that their main purpose is to make one's meaning plain to the reader, and (2) that the ideas now generally suggested by them are not always such as correspond to their original etymology; in fact, we have to take things as they are, and not as strict usage would demand. I am not quite clear, too, what alternative Major Withers would suggest for the term

“spiritual”: perhaps “visible” and “invisible” would represent the distinction between the two interpretations of our Lord’s Coming more exactly *from one point of view*; but “invisible” does not cover all that is desired to be expressed, and I venture to think that the term “spiritual” is more generally understood and is also substantially adequate; especially, perhaps, as I qualified it, twice over, by the word “entirely.” Surely there is no need to assume that it expresses anything not literal! I am inclined to think, moreover, that I am in good company in the matter; for I recall that in one of the Thirty-nine Articles it is stated that “The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten,” in the Lord’s Supper, “*only after an heavenly and spiritual manner.*” Is not that a parallel usage of the term “spiritual”?

I should like to add my hearty agreement with Major Withers’ brief reference to preconceptions and prejudices. It seems as if a very large number of people hold their views (on whichever side) in the matter of the interpretation of prophecy, simply because excellent men, whom they have known as teachers and guides, have taken that particular line. The times seem more than ever to call for earnest reconsideration of the whole matter.