

WHAT ARE WE TO TEACH ABOUT THE RETURN OF CHRIST?*

BY DAVID FOSTER ESTES, D.D., COLGATE UNIVERSITY,
HAMILTON, NEW YORK.

Of all the departments of theology, eschatology is again the most prominent, in some at least of its various aspects the most in men's minds and mouths. It is not the present purpose to discuss the grounds or significance of this fact, but accepting the situation, as, sooner or later, we must always do, to consider and restate some, at least, of the common views, and to suggest some of the arguments which make for or against these views. It would be impossible in a paper as brief as this must be, to attempt to sketch the history of these conceptions or to distinguish the varying shades of opinion among those in more or less general sympathy with each other's views, but no injustice will thus be done since no attempt will be made to state the faith of any individual. It is possible only broadly to sketch the divergent aspects of several views and some of the chief reasons why they seem to attract or repel.

It may be premised that due stress on the doctrine of "The Last Things" is important, not merely in view of late emphasis upon it, but always, because of its place in the circle of Christian truth. Neglected truth seems often to take strange and sad revenge, though of course it would be truer to say that the practically broken circle of truth gives room for error sometimes lamentable in its consequences. But peculiarly strong emphasis on the Return of Christ and the associated facts is no part of faith or duty. The Lord's command to "Watch" is widely misunderstood and misused. The very phrasing as well as the context shows that He is demanding, not sim-

*Copyright, 1919, D. F. Estes.

ply an expectant Church, but a Church ever awake and alert to every duty, the opposite of what is frequently styled a "dead" Church. Nor is the expectancy of His Return which many now demand essential to the vigor of Christian life and service which He required. It is interesting to note, for example, that the late honored A. J. Gordon, pronounced premillennialist as he was, yet found his chief stimulus in his ministry of scarce surpassed diligence and effectiveness, not so much in thinking of Christ's coming soon, as in the profound impression of the constant spiritual presence of his Master, as is shown by his book, *How Christ Came to Church*. It is to be remembered that fidelity and earnestness in service hang on no theories, whatever they may be.

It scarcely needs to be stated that today what may be designated with sufficient accuracy, the "premillennialist" view seems almost to occupy the field. Such is the prominence in the sphere of Christian activities of many of its advocates, such is their personal worth and their success in service, notably in soul-winning, such is also their urgency in the presentation of their views, from the pulpit, by the press, in large conferences expressly organized as propaganda, that many are perhaps ready to grant their claim that they have reached the final truth on this point. It may be noted, however, that whatever the fundamental agreement, room must be allowed for wide variation on many important points. The one common feature and factor is the assurance that the end of the present order of mundane things, ecclesiastical, political, social, is now near at hand, in its inception at least to be, so to speak, daily expected with confident assurance, and that the change will come about by the personal return from Heaven to earth of the Lord Christ, who is now without further delay to appear in order to crush all forms of evil and to give glorious victory to His cause. This view is presented by many as being the one truth of paramount importance today, while failure to accept it

or to emphasize it is treated as amounting to disloyalty to revelation and to the Lord Himself. Around this central core of Christ's personal return to conquer by force a world which has made ready for His return only by the increasing need of it, only because it has grown steadily worse in character and more hostile to Himself, are braided in the minds of many prominent advocates of this view divers other views as well. It is now widely held that Christ's return is at least a double event, that first He comes for His saints—this coming and the "going away of the Bride" being commonly held to be a secret affair—and that later He brings them with Him to share His reign in a most public and glorious fashion. The return of the Jews to Palestine, their re-establishment as a nation with capital, temple, and renewed sacrificial system, and many other political events touching mainly the territory once within the ancient empire of the Romans, are by many if not by most insisted on as certain. It is also commonly held that when just another thousand years have passed the end will finally come in resurrection and judgment. It would not be fair to urge that all these points, together with still others which some at least would emphasize but which need not now be restated, are a part of the view that Christ is immediately to return. It is enough to say that those who hold the "premillennial" view agree at least on these two points, that the Second Advent is now at last very near, and that Israel shall be re-established in its former country, to which might well be added the insistence on the Thousand Year personal reign of Christ and His saints on earth.

No one who has studied the history of Christian doctrine, or, indeed, the progress of thought in any sphere, will be surprised to find the converse, not to say the reverse, view flourishing markedly alongside the great bourgeoning of the "premillennial" view just stated, and such is the fact. Today there are many who reject the

whole program of the premillennialists, including in their denials not merely the extended program of eschatological events which has been suggested, but also the very idea of any but a simply spiritual coming again to earth of the Lord Christ. This view is held by not a few men among us of piety and spirituality, who have also a deserved reputation for wide learning, and it is urged in the name of both scholarship and spirituality. Its advocates have no program for the future: they only insist, positively and optimistically, that the forces now operative for good on the earth are enough to secure the prevalence of the Kingdom of Christ and the doing of God's will on earth as in Heaven itself, negatively, that the course of human history will end in no cataclysm, not even in resurrection and judgment as has been the world-wide, age-long faith of the Church from the apostles to today. They know nothing of any "end": there shall be no "last things", nor shall He who went away ever personally return to earth.

Such, in brief, are the great contrasting eschatological theories or conceptions which are today most widely and forcefully urged, in favor of each of which seems to stand something like a regularly organized and systematic propaganda, between which not a few may be supposing that they must, or, at any rate, ought to choose, and each of which may be reasonably supposed to gain by the very existence of the other, for each may win as adherents not only such as are specially susceptible to its own appeal, but also such as are repelled by the other view. But a choice between these supposedly alternative views should not be made without careful weighing of the arguments for and against each and both. A full statement and thorough analysis of these arguments might well fill a large volume, and of course in such a paper as this little more is possible than merely to hint at their nature and weight. This, however, must be our next task.

The "premillennial" theory rests mainly, if not wholly, on the supposed teaching of the Scriptures. "Thus it

is written", is in the minds of its supporters the beginning of argument and the end of controversy. Nor can it be denied that much in the Bible can be marshalled in its favor with no apparent violence to its sense, to the hasty, untrained, or superficial thinker seemingly in full harmony with the thought of the ancient authors. Especially if the assumption is accepted that it was the divine purpose that the chief facts of human history should be actually, even though obscurely, written beforehand, it will be easy to convince oneself that the program of Jewry and Christendom until the consummation can be found by searching the pages of Holy Writ. In Hebrew prophecy much confessedly remains unfulfilled: it may fairly be granted that the New Testament writers seemed to look for Christ's speedy return, and there are sentences and phrases here and there which may be heard to speak wonderful things when the ear has once been trained to such hearing. In a word, it is urged in season and out of season that it is to be accepted as the final result of Bible study both that Christ will now speedily return, and that His return will be preceded and accompanied by more or less of the events in the program already sketched.

But before it is accepted that such is the real teaching of Scripture, the actual content of Divine revelation, much remains to be considered. First, it should be carefully taken into account that what is thus positively set forth as unquestionably the teaching of Scripture is not what the majority of intelligent, reverent, obedient students of Scripture have recognized as its teaching. In view of the unqualified assurance with which these conceptions are asserted to be Biblical, while anything else is false to God's Word, it ought to be emphasized that "premillennial" views of any sort are the views of the minority, really of a minority today, certainly, taking the Christian centuries together, of a relatively small minority. Now this fact is, by itself, of course, in no way decisive. Truth may at any time be found with a "rem-

nant", and it is the duty of every man to hold and set forth the truth as he sees it. This is not merely to be granted: it is to be insisted upon, as much for others as for ourselves. But along with the right of private judgment goes the responsibility which belongs to private judgment, the task of most thorough and careful investigation in order to reach sane and safe conclusions. Ripe scholarship and varied learning, spiritual sympathy with the teaching of Scripture, humble readiness to accept this teaching, and no less a readiness to be silent where it does not speak, all are needed by him who undertakes to interpret it. All the more is this preparation and labor indispensable when the attempt is made to correct the thinking of the great majority as to what is asserted to be the paramount Christian truth and by consequence the paramount Christian duty. Now it may well give us pause to note that while if we merely count the suffrages of all earnest Bible students as to what it really teaches, the verdict would be, as has been suggested, adverse to the "premillennialist" contentions, on many points most overwhelmingly so, this would be far more strikingly the case if instead of just counting votes, we should weigh their significance. It may fairly be said that scarcely a Biblical scholar of the first rank has ever held this view, and few who could reasonably be put in the second rank. In this statement of course no disrespect is intended to the men who have brought wide research to the confirmation of this theory and have spent unlimited pains and time in the microscopic investigation of all possibly apposite texts and history. What is meant is that if we rate Biblical scholars according to their eminence outside the relatively narrow field with which we are now dealing, there are now at any rate no advocates of this view who stand in the first rank and few who should be placed even in the second rank.

Often, however, over against the judgment of so many eminent and reverent scholars who have given their best

powers in the utmost patience and humility to the intelligent comprehension of the meaning of God's Word to men, is set some catchy slogan, such as "I take the Bible just as it reads", or "I believe the Bible means just what it says". But these watchwords can be used as they usually are, only unthinkingly. It is forgotten that the Bible does not read itself, but that we read it, and consequently how "it reads" depends on the reader. In a publication which gives great prominence to the fundamental tenets of this school it was not long ago very sanely said in words which, indeed, deserve a wider application than the author probably intended: "We may be quite certain of the great realities of Christ's imminent return, and the meaning of the stirring among the dry bones of Israel, but there are many details and niceties of interpretation that rest upon our human understanding of the written Word." All the history of interpretation in reference to all language in every language shows how easy it is to read into words what their author never thought of, or to read out of them what he intended most positively to assert. It would scarcely be possible to pass a day in a courtroom without finding fresh and full demonstration of this. We all know that what is seen depends largely on the eye: how the Bible reads to any depends no less on himself. It is still more true and pertinent to say that what the Bible says is in fact what it really means to say. What the writer of Scripture intended and attempted to tell us, just that, all that, no less, no more, no other, is what is to be attributed to him as what he did say. To be sure the Bible "means what it says", for what it says is actually what it means to say, and to ascertain this meaning often demands as well as rewards the best intelligence of the best students of Scripture.

It must now be further noted that with all the painstaking of "premillennial" scholars (and the untiring laboriousness of many is to be respectfully recognized even when we are forced to consider it mistakingly employed)

their conclusions are vitiated by their initial failure to use the principles of interpretation which are indispensable for the comprehension of anything said in any language of men, which are no less, nay, more necessary for the understanding of Scripture on the very ground of the paramount importance which God's book possesses for men, principles which are verified in the study of all other parts and teachings of the Bible and so may not be arbitrarily set aside in reference to the "last things". One of these universally valid principles is that literal and figurative language may not be confused, that just as language used literally must be understood literally, in the same way language figuratively intended must be so understood. An illustration of failure to employ this principle is to be found in their interpretation of the important millennial passage (Rev. 20:4-6), a saying in the one book of all in the Bible most crammed with symbol and figure, which, however, is by this school interpreted literally, without attempt at justification. Again, it may be noted that often plain and definite statements are interpreted by the obscure. For example, the writer has a respected friend, who has studied the science of medicine much and to good purpose, but the science of the interpretation of language little if at all, who yet insists on the trustworthiness of his own methods and results as to the meaning of Scripture, though he would rightly disregard any attempt of the writer to criticise his medical methods and conclusions. Questioned as to the meaning of a fairly definite passage of Scripture, his answer was, "To learn its meaning we must go to the parables". In other words, the understanding of a literal declaration is to be modified by what is thought to be the meaning of parables certainly obscure, as is demonstrated by the variety of interpretations given to them. Indeed, it may not unfairly be said that the more obscure the book or the passage and the more difficult and in the end the more uncertain its interpretation, so much the greater the freight of won-

derful ideas gathered from it, and so much the more positive the assertion of them by the "premillennialist" theorists.

Another great law to be recognized in the use of Scripture is the principle of progress in revelation, that the later is fuller and clearer than the earlier, and consequently that the earlier must be read in the light of the later, not that the meaning of the later may be read into the earlier, but that the earlier should not be treated as the controlling word of truth. An illustration of this law is, for example, now generally recognized in the increasing clearness of revelation as to the doctrine of immortality in Scripture. Now in violation of this principle much "premillennial" doctrine rests absolutely or controllingly on the Old Testament and not on the New. For example, the New Testament is scanned in vain for anything which can fairly be impressed into support of the expected return of the Jews to Palestine.

The only other violation of sound principles of interpretation which may still be mentioned here is the unjustified and unjustifiable conception of the purpose of prophecy. Instead of recognizing that the message of a prophet was always primarily a message to the men of his own time to whom he spoke or for whom he wrote, it is constantly assumed, whether consciously or unconsciously it matters not, that the prophets were sent to tell what should happen at least two millenniums after they and all who heard them had fallen on sleep. That this is a grave error may be shown in many ways. One striking proof of its falsity may be found in the fact that if so intended, it has failed; even in what are believed to be the very last years before the "Midnight Cry", there is no agreement among the students of this school as to what historical events were referred to. Another demonstration quite as striking and to the mind of the writer absolutely conclusive is found in the recognizably momentous events of history no hint of which is found in any

accepted interpretation of prophecy. Take, for an illustration, the rise of Islam, drawing away by conquest a large part of the world where Christianity had then spread and for centuries imperiling, so far as men can see, the very existence of Christianity as well as civilization, all of which finds no acknowledged forecast. Where shall we go in prophecy for any clear prediction of the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches with its prolonged and serious consequences, of the Reformation, of the wars growing out of the Reformation movement which so long devastated Europe, all of which had much to do with organized Christianity? Or, again, is it not irrational to suppose, as is involved in much "premillennial" teaching, that the prophetic prevision under divine guidance would limit itself absolutely to so much of the world's surface as Rome conquered before it fell? Was it important to tell the place of Roumania and Spain in the now expected reorganization of the world, while Russia, Japan, the United States are left out of the forecast? To sum up this part of the discussion, it may be said that while still other important principles of interpretation are violated by the teachers of the "premillennial" school, to give due application to the few that have been named would dispose of most of the asserted Scripture justification of the theory. If figurative language is understood as figurative, if the plain dominates the understanding of the more doubtful, if the progress of doctrine in Scripture is recognized, if prophecy is connected primarily with its own age, the "premillennial" theory would be maimed beyond recognition.

Another point to be considered, so far as the scripturalness of the "premillennial" theory is concerned, relates to the question what the New Testament teachers intended to communicate to their hearers or readers. Without exception those who hold this view insist that we must hold that the end is now near because according to their ideas the New Testament record shows that those

whose words are there recorded taught then that the time was short, that the end of all things would be speedy, that Christ was to come quickly. They fail to take sufficiently into account that thus they are unwittingly doing their utmost to fasten an error on these teachers. If that was their teaching it was false, for eighteen hundred years have passed and the end is not yet, and in this way they are undermining the trustworthiness of the Book on which they build, to say nothing of actually playing into the hands of the rationalists whom they abhor. A natural consequence of such teaching was seen when after the corresponding movement in the last century, sometimes called "Millerism", there followed a wave of infidelity, as it was then styled, rejection of the Bible, of Christianity and of Christ. Whether similar results will follow this similar movement remains to be seen. In any event, men who insist that they are to a peculiar degree defenders of the authority of Scripture are already seriously impairing men's confidence in it. At the same time, the opposite school, the school which denies that we know anything of the end, insists no less that the New Testament authors positively taught that the end was then near. If the interests of Christianity, the Church and souls were not involved, it would be amusing to watch the harmony of effort to draw from the New Testament the doctrine of Christ's speedy return on the part of these two schools in every other respect so antithetic, so definitely hostile to each other.

In answer to these joint contentions, the point should be insistently made and remade, if for no other reason, then simply in the interest of truth, that nowhere in the New Testament is the assertion made that the return of Christ would be speedy. Even if it be granted that it was the personal expectation of the New Testament writers that the Lord would soon return, that does not justify us in declaring that that is the teaching of the New Testament, unless it is somewhere positively taught. No doc-

trine of inspiration, however high and broad, ever included in the authoritative teachings of the Book all notions which might have formed a part of the mental furniture of the writers, and no criticism, however anti-pathetic to their doctrines, should attempt to deal thus unfairly with them. An idea is not taught unless the teacher intentionally asserts it. Otherwise, as Paul and Peter and John undoubtedly harbored the notion of the time that the earth was flat, that, too, might absurdly be included among the doctrines of Scripture, but it is just as unfair to assert that they taught that the end was coming quickly, when no author, properly understood, sets a date, near or far, definite or vague, or even discusses the time limit at all. On the contrary, the tone of their declarations is strikingly unlike that common to modern Adventists and their sympathizers, as must inevitably be remarked by those who have opportunity impartially to compare the two. Once, indeed, Paul was thought by some to have given out the teaching that the end was immediately to be expected, and at once he dispatched an urgent correction and an emphatic denial that he taught or held any such view. But it is a striking illustration of how hard it is for truth to overtake error that in spite of Second Thessalonians the misunderstanding of First Thessalonians and similar expressions of the apostle still persists. In view of the assertions which we read and hear so constantly and glibly made by men of both schools that the New Testament writers taught their readers to expect Christ immediately to appear, is to be set the significant fact that throughout the centuries the New Testament has not made that impression. Here and there a few, sometimes more, have thought so, but on the whole devout and intelligent students of the Bible have not thought so. How can this be accounted for except on the ground that the idea is not to be drawn from the New Testament unless and until it is first forced into it?

We should also consider as carefully as space will permit, the pessimism involved in the "premillennial"

theory, as most commonly held. This includes three elements, all supposed to be drawn from Scripture, or, at least, substantiated by it. The first is that the moral condition of the world is steadily growing worse: the second, that the forces for good, even the Divine forces, now acting in the world, are absolutely incapable of staying the onrushing and overwhelming tide of evil, and, third, that the reappearing Christ must and will by display and exercise of Divine power and majesty finally beat down all opposition to the will of God. Now it is to be insisted that not one of these notions is demonstrated or made probable or even plausible either by the Scripture which is commonly adduced in its favor or by any process of reasoning. It is not practicable now to take up the Scriptural argument in detail. Could this be done, it would, in the judgment of the writer, be shown that while the continued existence of evil and its intensifying under certain conditions is predicted, yet nowhere in the Bible is there any assertion that on the whole and as a whole the world will worsen till the Second Advent. Nor does history any more justify this view. It is enough to say that it would scarcely be possible to imagine a more striking example of the blinding effect which a theory may exert than the fact that in a land and a generation which has seen slavery abolished, has seen the liquor traffic lessened and limited to the point of extinction, has seen the world at last awakened to the social evil and its consequences and its suppression demanded, has seen gifts for philanthropic purposes lavished by the hundred million dollars and lives offered by the million for the support of noble ideals, in the face of all this, to say nothing of the condition and work of the churches at home and abroad, the declaration is yet boldly reiterated that the world is growing worse!

False as is this first conception historically and sociologically, the second conception is no less false religiously. The teaching as to the "widowed Church" and

of the assured failure, or at most the limited purpose, of the work of the Holy Spirit are alike false and pernicious. Fortunately, the sentiment of many is sounder than is their theology, and they rejoice in the presence of the Divine Son who fulfills to the soul the promise to be with us to the end of the age, and who no less fills the Church which is the body of which He is the head. Not only does the Church by the wondrous paradox of the presence of the absent now and ever possess its absent Lord, but also the whole power of God is in the Holy Spirit now acting and efficient to accomplish His work in the world. Christ Himself said that it was better for Him to go away, and thus departing He sent the Spirit to accomplish the work of salvation. There is an idea of importance in this connection which Paul gives on the ground of a verse in the Psalms, and which we also find in Hebrews, the thought of Christ sitting in regal majesty waiting till the victory is won. He took His seat at God's right hand waiting from that time onward till His enemies shall be put as a footstool under His feet: He must continue King till He shall have put all enemies under His feet. In other words, the conquest shall precede the Return.

In the light of psychology and ethics the third basal conception will be found equally false. Force can conquer, subdue, break down, but cannot remould or persuade. As Christ would not use a sign from Heaven while here because it would have had no moral effect, so He could not win men to Himself, even though He Himself surrounded by hosts of angels and myriads of saints and all the majesty of Heaven were to be the sign. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead." If men are not drawn by the uplifted Christ, then not even the return of the risen and glorified Christ would evoke faith and love. Where love fails to win, force is hopeless: where obedient faith is lacking, constrained consent is worthless: where the potent Spirit is impotent, might and majesty will ac-

comply no more. We must not dream of substituting the mallet for the magnet as a means of winning willing subjects for the King.

If for these and other reasons we are compelled to set aside the contentions of the "premillennial" school, it is also to be said that arguments no less conclusive hinder the acceptance of the other theory much in favor today, which for want of a better name may perhaps be styled, intelligibly at least, the "negative" theory. This view is, in a word, that we are not to expect any personal return of Christ at any time in any relations for any purpose, answering the question, "When shall He appear?" by simply saying, "Never". Those who doubtless still constitute the great majority of Christian believers will feel that it is a decisive objection to this view that it antagonizes the teaching of the New Testament. This antagonism is no less recognized by those who hold and urge this view, they confessing the divergence, sometimes, it may be, with humility and regret, more often, seemingly, with quite other feelings. Attempts are made to justify this setting aside of clear New Testament teaching in at least two ways. It is insisted that the dating of Christ's return in that generation is an essential part of that teaching, and as that has failed, consequently the whole doctrine falls to the ground. Indeed, only absolute confidence in the fairness of the brethren who urge this view prevents us from sometimes feeling that extravagant stress is laid on the element of nearness in time, to a degree out of harmony with their else commonly sane exegesis, with unconscious, if never conscious, purpose to discredit not this doctrine only, but also the teaching of those who taught it. Extremes often meet: sworn enemies clasp hands. But when insisted upon by scholars of the "negative" school, as when by enthusiasts of the "premillennial" school, the answer should be that the element of early date is no essential part of the doctrine, that no apostle, any more than his Master, ever asserted

that the end would fall in his generation or that those then living should behold it. The for a time apparently all-engulfing wave of the "eschatological" interpretation of the mission and message of Jesus seems rapidly ebbing, so that there are few now to insult their Lord by attributing to Him the assertion that after His death He would in a few days reappear to take up His broken work. The wave of "eschatological" interpretation of His apostles, as if they gave no room for the centuries which we have already seen, ebbs more reluctantly, as it were, but sooner or later, it may be expected that the recognition will prevail that the whole New Testament teaching as to the things of the end is without date, so that it loses none of its trustworthiness, however long the desired consummation be delayed.

Another method employed by the "negative" school to discredit the teaching of the New Testament is to point out what are asserted to be its origin and affinities. Its likeness to the Apocalyptical documents popular in certain Hebrew circles at the time is said to be such that its existence must be due to them, and as they are of course not authoritative to anybody, it is expected that the inference will be readily and generally drawn that the doctrine of the Second Advent has no greater value from the lips of Paul and John and Jesus than the wildest anonymous tracts of first century apocalypticism. To some extent this expectation is justified. The little understood but to most minds ill-omened name of Apocalypticism seems to many to be an indictment which warrants conviction and capital punishment without stopping to weigh the evidence. Yet if it is proved that to some extent the Christian teaching retains and reproduces Jewish elements, its falsity is not thereby demonstrated. That God is one, that He would send His Messiah, that He will forgive the penitent, are each and all survivals of Jewish thought in Christian teaching. If the doctrine of the Second Advent is related in some way to Jewish thought,

it is not by that fact alone discredited. It needs, however, but a very moderate acquaintance with the fanatical Jewish literature of the times to recognize the essential diversity in tone as well as scope. Unless under the influence of a theory, who could associate as of the same stock and to be bound in the same bundle and burned together the extravagant forecasts and visions of the apocalyptists and the sane warnings of Paul, the spiritual messages of John, and the promises of return and judgment which Jesus gave to His disciples?

Unless the tendency to flout and disdain the teachings of the New Testament spreads more rapidly and into wider circles than has thus far been the case the "negative" theory with its denials can hardly stand against the "premillennial" with its assertion of Scripture authority; except as one may gain by reaction from what are thought the extravagances of the other. While to some minds its novelty may be an attraction, so long, that is, as it is novel, yet many will be repelled by the break with the continuity of Christian thought. It is not without verbal justification that premillennialists charge those who deny the doctrine of Christ's return with heresy. To be sure, this now seems no serious matter. Indeed, the charge may in these days help rather than hinder. But if we consider the matter without prejudice for or against heresy or heretics, it must be owned that the opposition to the thought prevalent in Christ's Church in all ages is such that the denial of His return is heretical, as premillennialists charge. But whatever the significance of this, the "negative" school may in turn retort with a countercharge which may be abundantly justified from church history, namely, that the "premillennial" view is schismatic in tendency. Century after century the doctrine has proved divisive. There are still those among us within whose life time flourished and festered the Millerite millennialism, whose fruits were the weakening of the Church in many districts for decades, a crop

of infidels, and the group of Adventist denominations—paralysis of church activity, shattering of individual faith, and, worst of all because most widespread and permanent, the sin of schism. To some who study the signs of the times history seems tending to repeat itself: may the Head of the Church through the Divine Spirit so guide and restrain the thoughts and words of brethren who love His truth and His Church even as they do His appearing that the twentieth century shall not actually reproduce on an even greater scale this sad fact of the nineteenth!

But as between Scylla and Charybdis, the rock of crushing denial of the teachings even of Jesus Himself on the part of the “negative” school and the whirlpool of wild theorizings and prophesyings which is the danger among the extreme “premillennialists”, what safety remains, what can we do? It is now to be most carefully noted that these two theories which have been discussed do not exhaust the possibilities of the case, that we are not shut up to these alternatives. Besides these modern views which claim to cover the ground, there remains a third view. As a matter of fact, we have yet the faith of the Christian centuries as a whole, of the Christian theologians in general, of the mass of Christian saints, which abides still unshattered by the assaults from either angle. No sufficient reason has yet been shown for blotting a word of any of the great Christian Creeds in reference to the Last Things, or for adding even the shortest codicil to these expressions of faith. There are three great Christian facts which may be summed up in three words, Return, Resurrection, Judgment. After all the noisy exegetical discussions and extravagant claims as to what is to be found in Scripture, it may still be said that these three words sufficiently sum up the whole teaching of the New Testament and the essential faith of the Church. It should be added that if this may fairly be said, then it ought to be stated and restated with emphasis and force in these days by all those who hold close to their

hearts not only the "healthful doctrine" of the Book, but also the peace, prosperity and progress of Christ's Church. To be sure, bad money will drive good out of circulation, but, all the more because error is noisily huckstered, should every friend of truth offer it in the market: there are still those who are glad to "buy the truth".

Let it be repeated that the eschatological teaching of the New Testament is sufficiently summed up in the promise of Christ's Return, the hope of Resurrection, the declaration of final Judgment. As to the date of these great events, as to the signs which some would fain find, as to the history of the Jews, the Church and the world in the centuries, few or many, which may intervene between the cloud above the slopes of Olivet which received the departing Lord and the sound of the trumpet which shall herald Him returning, as to all this the Master Himself never told His disciples, and no apostle ever tried to declare. The truths of Return, Resurrection, and Judgment we humbly take from the lips of Jesus: we hear Paul declaring them before the Council of the Areopagus, and find him writing them to the Thessalonians and Corinthians: we read them in other books of the New Testament: we trace them still unblurred not only in the Revelation but also in the Gospel of John and his great Epistle.

That this is the Scripture teaching is corroborated by the consentient recognition of all Christendom. These three truths, Return, Resurrection, Judgment, which we find embedded in the "Apostles' Creed ("from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. . . . I believe in the resurrection of the body"), are no less embodied in all the great Confessions of the Church in all its history and divisions through the centuries. The great theologians (may it not be said, without the exception of a single outstanding name?) have enwrought these truths into the texture of their systems:

the faith of Christians has everywhere and always taken up these truths and held them fast, with varying clearness and strength it may be admitted, but Christendom as a whole never losing hold of them and never adding to them: the Christian pulpit has found sanction for its warnings and for its encouragements in the proclamation of these truths, and today in spite of confusing clamor substantially as in years that are gone is still preached the Christian message of the Master's Return, the Resurrection of them that are in their graves, and the Judgment of all nations.

What is thus the Scriptural and historical faith of the Church, justifies itself sufficiently before the tribunal of reason. Those who hold to the saving interposition by God in the course of this world in the person and work of His eternally Divine Son may well hold that He who came as a babe to be rejected will come again as a King for the world which He is conquering by His Cross. Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead? For centuries there has never risen as of late from the fields of earth appeals for judgment to Him who has declared, "Vengeance is mine: I will repay". It is certainly not absurd, it may well be accepted, as it has been by the vast majority, that the history of earth, where the drama of good and evil has been played as it has been should end in the great climax of Christ's Return, our Resurrection, the world's Judgment.

It remains only to add that as nothing has now arisen to shake the faith so long unshaken, so the faith in these three verities is still sufficient, as it has proved in the past. So far as concerns this great theme of which we have been thinking no good grounds have been shown why there should be an addition to the age-long belief of Christendom. No need has been proved for any new theology, whether rationalistic and negative or fanciful and fanatical in its proclamations and tendencies. The needs of the hour will be best met, not by the hasty adop-

tion of the dogmas of any schismatic sect, or of the tenets of any proselyting party, or of the denials of any skeptical school, but rather by the clear acceptance of the Bible truths which underlie the creeds of the Church universal and by the positive, intelligent, sane assertion, alike in its content and its limits, of the old faith which has been the rational, historical, Scriptural faith of the Church, no more, no less, the faith in Christ's return to raise and judge the world. To this may many dedicate themselves anew in these days of doubt and of clamor.