

in Divine glory and with angelic attendants, (3) his Coming to universal judgment and requital ("every man according to his deeds"), (4) yet some of those who hear his words would live to see their fulfilment. Would not this prediction brand him for all time as a false prophet? Would not this language strike the early Christians, when they compared the fulfilment with the prophecy, as highly extravagant? Yet these words were allowed to stand on record. Why did not the early Christians stumble at language which causes us such perplexity? In answer to this question, I quote the words of Professor J. Henry Thayer: "They accepted the language of Jesus in the symbolic significance which current Jewish usage largely gave it. The prevalent Messianic expectations in our Lord's day were in the main confused, earthly, out of harmony with the spiritual Kingdom which he aimed to establish. The task which confronted him was, how to lift his hearers from that which was secular to that which was spiritual—from thoughts of locality to aspirations after quality; how to transform a kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God. And it was achieved, as his entire work was achieved, by first stooping to their level; by using their language; by adjusting his teaching so far as he truthfully could to their conceptions; by lodging the power of an endless life in local and temporary forms, and trusting to its expansive and transforming energy for the triumphant result" (24).

The Key to their Interpretation.

If we are to be saved from hopeless confusion in interpreting the New Testament teaching on the "Parousia," we must recognize these two principles: First, it was necessary that Christ should make use of concrete imagery, material symbols, the current dramatic phrasology, in order to convey spiritual truth to his first hearers. Recognition of this historic element in his teaching will help to prepare us for the task of stripping off the temporal husk in order to reach the

(24). *Historical Element in the New Testament*, p. 106.