

## THE SECOND ADVENT OF THE PAST.—No. II.

BY REV. THOS. RATTRAY.

The second advent as of the past is not now presented as a curious and interesting, yet impracticable, theory. The design is to show that its bearing on the harmony of Scripture, the removal of doctrinal error, and the sad divisions in Christendom, point to it as the great need of our times. It may jar seriously with some doctrines in all the theologies. It may subject to a severe strain the prevalent Churchianity, and so doing may excite violent opposition. Its merit will, however, be seen in its bringing to the foreground the deified and reigning Son of God as absolutely Lord of all, and the Holy Scriptures as the sole law of His kingdom, and both as giving the only basis for salvation and communion, and therefore the living agencies in Christianity as the final and universal religion.

The theory now presented may frown at any attempt to found a church on a human exposition of Scripture, and may therefore be adverse to nearly all existing churches. Asserting as it does the absolute rule of the Son of God and the supreme authority of Scripture, it may imply free Biblical interpretation in the pulpit and outside of it. It may proclaim service to the reigning Son of God in an absolute sense, and the Word as the sole law of His reign, and thus binding men to Christ and the Word may utterly disclaim obedience to men or churches or human theologies. It may solve the difficult question, "What is the Church?" as the aggregate of all professed believers, and therefore as the sum of all their assemblies founded on Christ and the Word. Declaring that the reigning Son of God had as a Priest made a perfect and final purification of sins before he became King in Zion, it may resolve the conditions of salvation and communion into obedience to Him and the Word, and put down any attempt to enforce other conditions, as obedience to this or the other system of theology. It may thus free Christianity of the load of human inventions which have encumbered it, and exhibit it in its spirituality and catholicity. It may pronounce the Romish Mass a cheat and a snare, and remind Protestants that their use of the Sacrament of the Supper should be simply as a memento of the night of Christianity before the coming glory of the morning dawn of the kingdom of God.

I mention these as results which may be expected from a general reception of the theory of the second advent now advocated, and as showing its practical character and its claim to the attention of all Christians, especially that they may bring it to the test of Scripture without regard to prevalent views. Christians everywhere are tired of theories which are merely such. We are living in a practical age. We have been filled with the husks and desire the food that nourishes. We are perplexed by the many theologies and ecclesiasticisms of the day, and also by the many Churches, each one called a Church of Christ. We are harassed by what may be named the *modern polytheism*, and sigh for unity in the Son of God. We know that in Him is life and nowhere else. We believe that "this is the true God and eternal life." We want to obey the injunction, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." We know not how to do it amid the abounding *polytheism* of churches many and creeds many. We have no wish to question the mystery of the Trinity in the Godhead, yet we cling to a divine unity in the government of the final age. We do believe that in it "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son"; that "He hath appointed Him heir of all things"; that "He is Lord of all"; that "all power has been given Him in heaven and in earth"; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, in earth, and under the earth." We believe that all these Scripture statements and others refer to the kingdom of God established when the Mosaic dispensation passed away in A.D. 70, and to the Son of God as its King, and as such "God over all and blessed for ever." In the recognition of this we see the condemnation of the so-called polytheism of churches many and creeds many, and the dawning of the desired morning over distracted Christendom when to the reigning Son of God will be the gathering of all the people, and when faith in and obedience to Him and His Word will be acknowledged as the one and perfect test of salvation and communion.

It must be a hard task to reconcile the texts now quoted with a quasi-reign of the Son of God as a saving priest, or with an absolute reign yet in the future. The attempt has involved Christendom in endless perplexities and distractions. The church has ruled instead of Christ, and expositions of the Word have taken the place of Scripture. There has been no king in Israel, and every man does that which is right in his own eyes. Scripture plainly says that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment and rule to the Son." The church traverses this announcement and says that the Son is to the end of time a serving mediator. Scripture says that at the end the Son shall become subject to the Father, and that from the passing away of the Mosaic dispensation to the end He will be absolute Sovereign of the age, the Father excepted, "Who did put all things under Him." The church nullified this statement by extending the serving mediatorship to the end of time, thus disallowing any future subjection of the Son to the Father, and in the absence of an absolute reign of the Son assumes the needed authority and rules the Israel of God with absolute sway, interpreting Scripture and authoritatively applying its expositions. The action of the church involves practical issues of vast moment. I mean to show that the theory of the second advent now advocated involves also vast and *beneficent* practical results.

The Romish idea of the Kingdom of God as a vast earthly ecclesiastical kingdom, has made a permanent impression on the Protestant mind. We are dazed by it, and incapable to rightly understand the spiritual and invisible nature of the kingdom over which the Son of God reigns. We transform Christianity into Churchianity as readily as does the Pope, with the sole exception that we displace his idea of an earthly unity, by the stultifying idea of a multi-form and increasing diversity, as a better conception of what in Scripture is called "the kingdom, or reign of heaven or of God." If the papal idea is false, ours is worse. If the one is a mistake, the other is a blunder which is said to be worse than a crime. If the Kingdom of God was designed to have an earthly expression in the form of an ecclesiastical earthly kingdom, the papal idea of its unity is reasonable, while ours of an endlessly increasing diversity, is void of even the appearance of what is right or proper. Yet we

cling to it that our Churches may have what we think is a Divine basis. We cling to it that we may fight Rome with her own weapons. A vain attempt, for if the Kingdom of God was designed to have manifestation in earthly ecclesiastical kingdoms, the uncultured common sense of mankind will say, not in many but in one. Such is the general conviction, for the most part latent and not expressed, because attended by a fear, that the true sense of the earthly expression of the Kingdom of God has not been reached.

It is not unlikely that what caused the error concerning the Church, was also the occasion of the greater error respecting the second advent. Visibility of the Kingdom of God in an earthly ecclesiastical kingdom provoked the desire, and led to the belief of a visible manifestation of the Son of God in regal power. Both were the product of that weakness in the human nature, which ever prefers the evidence of sense to that of faith, and confounds the infinitude of the realm of the supernatural with that of the material. We are not ignorant of this weakness in our nature. The history of Christendom abundantly reveals it. The temporary and shadowy dispensation of Moses, has by it been raised from its grave, and clothed in Christian raiment, has been made to play a considerable part in the times of the final age. A dispensation confined to one nation, and merely introductory to one embracing the whole earth, minutely ritual, because local and temporary, it has been regarded in all Christian times, and by nine-tenths of the Christian people, as a divine rule for the regulation of the outward in the new, the universal, and the final dispensation. Such an error, not confined to the Greek and Latin Churches, but largely permeating the Churches of the Reformation, an error so palpable in the light of the writings of the New Testament, as to strike the enlightened Christian with profound amazement at its conception and maintenance through the many centuries of the past, suggests the inference that an error from the same source has placed the second advent at the close of time, or in the yet distant future. Visibility of the Kingdom of God in an earthly ecclesiastical kingdom, or in many (how many no one can say) earthly ecclesiastical kingdoms as in the Reformed Churches, has so vitiated the universal Christian mind, that is well nigh impossible to impress on it any sense of the possibility of the regal advent of the Son of God, unless it takes place attended by the evidences which act on the physical in man.

The testimony of Scripture, which so clearly confines the regal advent of the Son of God to the time when the Mosaic dispensation passed away in A.D. 70, has been up to this late day ineffectual in convincing the professing Christian world of its truth. It has not yet penetrated through the flesh to the spirit. The former has become hardened by the roll of centuries, and by the teaching of a Judaized Christianity. We read Scripture concerning the Kingdom of God, through a veil, as did the Jews in the times of Paul. Moses is still dominant in Christendom. The woman at Jacob's well was not more mystified by the words of Christ than is the Christian world of this day. We have not yet come into the light of the glory of the kingdom of the final age. We have re-vivified Judaism, and so far have fallen from grace. We have materialized the second advent, the resurrection and the judgment. We have placed them in the future, and at the end of time. We cannot think of them as of the past, because their evidences have not been patent to the senses. As a consequence we fail to realize the true aspect of the Kingdom of God as a reign of life, and as such in marked contrast to the dispensation of Moses, which in Scripture is called "the letter which killeth," "the ministration of condemnation," "the ministration of death."

The Destructionist theory is making its mark on Christian thought. It is secretly spreading to an extent beyond calculation. It is held more or less strongly by ministers of all Protestant denominations. Avowed by only one here and there, it is nevertheless cherished or considered by vast numbers, who in their public services say nothing of their cogitations or conclusions on it. Its evidences, chiefly gathered from the Old Testament, are strangely inconclusive when brought before the blaze of light and life which fills the writings of the New Covenant. They are indeed there quenched as the stars before the rising sun. Yet, even when brought there, and the New Testament is read through the veil of our Judaized Christianity, they have sufficient force to draw the attention of many, and in some cases to produce conviction of their truth. If the final issues of the Kingdom of God are, with those of the previous dispensations, remitted to the end of time, so that death reigns in the one as it did in the others, and all men await a general resurrection at the end of time, it will have to be granted that the theory of Destructionism is, on Scriptural grounds, formidably strong.

To successfully meet this theory, we have to lay aside many of the long-settled conclusions on the second advent, the resurrection, and the judgment. They rest on false premises. They are inconsistent with the name given in Scripture to Christianity and the final dispensation. They are incongruous with the Messianic prediction of the Old Testament, with the words of Christ the exponent of prophecy, and with the writings of the Apostles. They rob the final dispensation of its true character as a reign of life, and as such in marked contrast to the previous dispensations. The key-note of it is given in the words of its King: "He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Not lightly did Paul speak of the dispensation of Moses, "for the letter killeth," and of that of Christ, "but the Spirit giveth life." What a broad line of demarcation did he draw in the terms he used for the one, and in those he applied to the other, as "the ministration of death," "the ministration of condemnation," and "the ministration of the Spirit," "the ministration of righteousness or justification,"—all expressive of the meaning of the death-symbols which cover the pages of the Old Testament, and of the life-symbols which fill the surface of the New Testament—of death reigning until the regal advent of the Son of God, and of life reigning from the beginning to the final end of His dispensation—of death swallowed up in victory at the beginning of His reign, so that all the righteous dead of former times were raised and entered for ever into the joy of their Lord, and from then and to the end of time the resurrection and the judgment continuous, so that the faithful are at the end of their earthly course "present with the Lord." The judgment an ever present reality. All now and always manifested before the judgment seat of Christ. The resurrection and judgment in the reign of the Prince of Life not simultaneous as before. They were necessarily such then until the regal advent of the only one mighty to save. But since, and to the end of time, *Hades* is abolished, death is

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