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ART. I.—THE SECOND ADVENT AND MODERN
UNBELIEF.

THE Christian's "blessed hope," which is the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus ii. 13), naturally and properly attracts much attention from "them that are without"—those of them, at least, who, from one motive or another, are disposed to make the Christian religion a matter of thought and study. If such make mistakes on the subject, it is only what we might expect, considering the point of view they occupy; but the mistakes they make may, none the less, be interesting and useful matter of thoughtful consideration to ourselves. It is specially noticeable how assailants of the Christian faith have of late made our Second Advent hope their own chosen ground from which to advance to the utter demolition of the New Testament revelation.

More than a century ago, in the notorious fifteenth chapter of his great work, the historian of "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" perpetrated this elaborate sneer at the Christian faith in general, though more immediately at the Christian hope of the Second Advent of Christ.

In the Primitive Church the influence of truth was very powerfully strengthened by an opinion which, however it may deserve respect for its usefulness and antiquity, has not been found agreeable to experience. It was universally believed that the end of the world and the kingdom of heaven were at hand. The near approach of this wonderful event had been predicted by the Apostles; the tradition of it was preserved by their earliest disciples; and those who understood in their literal sense the discourses of Christ Himself, were obliged to expect the second and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, before that generation was totally extinguished which had beheld His humble condition upon earth, and which might still be witness of the calamities of the Jews

under Vespasian or Hadrian. The revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation ; but as long as, for wise purposes, this error was permitted to subsist in the Church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians, who lived in the awful expectation of that moment when the globe itself and all the various races of mankind should tremble at the appearance of their Divine Judge.

To this is appended a note which tells us that " This expectation was countenanced by the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and by the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians."

To come nearer the present day. About twenty years ago, Mr. Voysey, as reported in the *Times*, declared as follows in his appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council :

I am quite aware that our Lord is represented as saying things that would encourage His disciples to look for His very speedy return in triumph and glory, and that not even that generation should pass away till they should see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. I need not waste words in showing you the error of this belief, and reminding you that the sun has not yet been darkened, nor the moon turned into blood, nor have the stars withdrawn from their shining ; that the sign of the Son of Man has not been seen in heaven, that He has not sent His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, nor has He been seen coming in the clouds with power and great glory ; that not only did none of these things come to pass within that generation which is fixed in the thirty-fourth verse of Matt. xxiv., but that about fifty-four generations have lived and died since these predictions were said to have been uttered. There is no alternative beyond this : either that Jesus Christ did not say these words, or that, if He said them, He must have been mistaken. I unhesitatingly choose the former of these alternatives, and believe that Jesus Christ never said these words, never intended to foretell anything so irrational, or so calculated to overthrow the moral government of God as the fulfilment of such a prediction would be.

Later still, we find Mr. S. Laing, in his " Modern Science and Modern Thought," saying :

St. Matthew reports Jesus to have said : " For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels ; and then shall He reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

It is certain that all standing there did taste death without seeing the Son of Man coming with His angels. The conclusion is irresistible, that either Jesus was mistaken in speaking these words, or else Matthew was mistaken in supposing that He spoke them.

St. Paul predicts the same event in still more definite terms [Mr. Laing quotes and comments on 1 Thess. iv. 15, 16, 17]—p. 254.

Again, if we turn to the New Testament, is it possible to consider writings inspired which contain the most distinct and definite prophecy that a certain event, the end of the world, would take place within a certain definite period, the lifetime of some of the existing generation, when, in point of fact, it did not occur, and has not occurred, for nineteen centuries afterwards ? (*Ibid.*, p. 357).¹

¹ Mr. Laing goes on to complete his case against the possible inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures : " Or, how can we believe them

Again, in the *Nineteenth Century* for April, 1889, Professor Huxley writes as follows in "Agnosticism ; a Rejoinder :"

But one thing is quite certain, if that belief in the speedy second coming of the Messiah which was shared by all parties in the Primitive Church, whether Nazarene or Pauline, which Jesus is made to prophesy over and over again in the Synoptic Gospels, and which dominated the life of Christians during the first century after the crucifixion—if He believed and taught that, then assuredly He was under an illusion, and He is responsible for that which the mere effluxion of time has demonstrated to be a prodigious error" (p. 501).

This follows hard on a longer passage, in which Professor Huxley puts forward as "the end of the whole matter," what is known as Baur's theory of the state of things in the Primitive Church, viz., that the religion of Jesus and His immediate followers and first disciples was simply that of a sect of the Jews differing in no important respect from the Judaism of the day ; while what has been called Christianity from the time of Paul to the present day was the invention of Paul himself, and deserves to be called Paulinism rather than Christianity. This has been recently, if never before, and most effectively, exploded by Dr. Salmon in his great work referred to in the preceding note, every reader of which must perceive that Professor Huxley's "end of the whole matter" is really a ludicrous mistake. If his "one thing quite certain" can also be shown to be by no means certain—rather

inspired, if some of the principal witnesses say of the cardinal miracle of the ascension that they were commanded to go to Galilee to witness it, while others, who describe it in detail, say that they were commanded not to go to Galilee, but to remain in Jerusalem, where the miracle actually took place ? Or how can we account for the oldest MS. of the Gospel, which is certainly one of the nearest, if not the nearest, to the original narrative, that according to St. Mark, omitting altogether any mention of any miraculous event connected with the resurrection ?" Of these two of Mr. Laing's three insuperable difficulties as to the inspiration of the New Testament (the first is dealt with in the text), we may say of that concerning "the cardinal miracle of the ascension," that it is wholly the result of his own remarkable and very instructive blundering. There is not the slightest appearance of discrepancy in the evidence of the witnesses of that miracle. No one was ever "commanded to go to Galilee" or anywhere else "to witness it." What took place on the mountain in Galilee was not the ascension of Jesus at the end of the forty days, but His appearing there risen from the dead to the eleven Apostles, and to "above five hundred brethren at once," and giving them the great commission to "Go, and make disciples of all the nations." This took place probably within the second week after the resurrection. As to the third difficulty of the three, that of St. Mark in his Gospel "omitting altogether any mention of any miraculous event connected with the resurrection," we observe that, curious as this is as a difficulty, it is founded on the supposition that St. Mark ended his Gospel with the words *ἐφοβήθησαν γάρ*, "for they were afraid," and we venture to recommend Mr. Laing and his readers to study Dr. Salmon's "Note on the Concluding Verses of St. Mark's Gospel," pp. 159-164 of his "Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament."

to be a very weak and worthless argument on his part—and if all that is “quite certain” about it is shown to be what no Christian need be ashamed of, and what many Christians glory in, then much will be gained for the cause of truth, and of Him who is “the Truth,” by its consideration.

It is evident that the writers we have quoted—and they are representative of many others—not only look upon what is revealed in the New Testament about the Second Advent of Christ as helplessly and hopelessly condemned as being demonstrably untrue, but consider its palpable untruth very serviceable as a weapon of offence against Christianity itself.

For this twofold purpose they insist on two things as inseparably connected with the Christian doctrine on the subject of the Second Advent of Christ. One is that generally Christ and His Apostles taught that His second coming would be a very speedy coming, would take place within the first few decades—certainly within the first century—after the ascension. The other is that certain utterances of our Lord, recorded in Matt. xvi. 27, 28, xxiv. 34, and the parallel places in Mark and Luke, teach that that event would take place while some who were living and listening to Him as He spake were still alive among men; as Gibbon puts it, “before that generation was totally extinguished which had beheld His humble condition upon earth.” These two points are almost one. They are scarcely separable. The second plainly includes and involves the first. But they suggest, and indeed require, separate consideration.

The first point is put with much strength and clearness in the sentence quoted above from Professor Huxley. The second is conspicuous in what we have quoted from Gibbon, and also from Messrs. Voysey and Laing; but we think it appears also, however dimly, as underlying Professor Huxley’s words.

I. There is one word in Professor Huxley’s statement to which we take exception as inaccurate, and in the use of which lies much of its plausibility. We mean the word “belief”—“that *belief* in the speedy second coming of the Messiah.”

Had he used instead the word “hope,” or even the word “opinion,” he would have spoken more accurately; but then he could hardly have spoken of Jesus as being made, in the Synoptic Gospels, to prophesy a hope or an opinion about His second coming. To speak of “prophesying a belief” is strange enough in the use of language by such a master of English as Professor Huxley; but he would hardly have spoken of “prophesying a hope” or “an opinion.” He would then probably have felt himself obliged to recast his sentence somewhat on this fashion: “But one thing is quite certain: if that hope”—“hope” is the word we decidedly prefer even to “opinion”—“if that hope

of the speedy second coming of the Messiah which was shared by all parties in the Primitive Church, whether Nazarene or Pauline, which was warranted by words of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels as spoken by Him over and over again . . . if He spoke words which warranted such a hope being entertained"—surely the Professor would have drawn rein here, and have hesitated before going on to say: "then assuredly He was under an illusion, and He is responsible for that which the mere effluxion of time has demonstrated to be a prodigious error." At any rate, if he still adhered to such a conclusion in connection with a *hope* or an *opinion*, as distinct from a *belief*, there would be little difficulty in showing that—to put the matter mildly—he was treating the Queen's English rather unfairly.

The distinction we draw between a *belief* and a *hope* may be best illustrated from the very matter which Professor Huxley says was a matter of *belief*, and which we admit was a matter of *hope*, for at least a century after the crucifixion.

If we are told by our Lord, as we are again and again, that He will come again with power and great glory; and if we believe Him, as well as believe in Him, as all Christians do, then His second coming in the future is a matter of *belief* as well as of *hope* to us. But suppose He had told us that He did not know when He would come again, that neither He, in the days of His flesh, nor the angels of God knew that, but the Father only; and that He had not revealed it to Him or to us—then our belief in the fact and our ignorance of the time would, in the love and desire of His appearing, become father and mother of the *hope* that He might come very speedily. But who would assert that the *hope* thus generated—thus warranted, we may say—is a *belief*, or has any right to be called a *belief*? Above all, who would hold our Lord responsible for "a prodigious error," if a hope so generated and so warranted had happily grown to dominate the life of His disciples in the first century, or in each and all of the succeeding centuries after His crucifixion?

We hold, in common with thousands of others, the hope of the speedy second coming of the Messiah. If it does not dominate our life and that of others who entertain it, it certainly ought to dominate them, and it is so much the worse for our lives if they are not so dominated. We hold that it ought to have been so with this "blessed hope," and the lives of Christians in every generation from the Day of Pentecost. But we hold also that it is quite possible that the second coming may not be for many centuries hence. So that our hope as to the speediness and our belief as to the fact of the second coming are quite distinct, though, of course, connected; though, in fact, the latter is father to the former, our ignorance as to the time being its

mother, as we have said. And if five hundred years hence—the dispensation having lasted so long—anyone should come upon this expression of our hope as to the speedy coming of Christ and end of the present world or age, we trust he will not therefore accuse us of holding any “prodigious error” on the subject; as assuredly we do not blame our Lord or His Apostles and prophets for teaching, or the Church of the first century for entertaining, such a hope in their day, because we are now in the nineteenth century after the crucifixion, and the second coming is still a matter of faith and hope for the future.

Besides, there is such an element of vagueness in the word “speedy” as to make a *belief* in “the speedy second coming of the Messiah” nothing more than a *hope* of it. For what is “speediness” in such a case as this? Does it exclude a delay of fifty years, or of eighty, or of one hundred, or two hundred years? Evidently, according to Professor Huxley himself, it is not inconsistent with a delay of one hundred years; for he asserts that the belief in the speedy coming still dominated the lives of men in the year A.D. 130, and that belief was, *ex hypothesi*, drawn from words spoken more than one hundred years before. Nor do we think he has any reason, or any wish, to limit the reign of that belief in the Church to the first century after the crucifixion; but he naturally wishes to keep well within the time, so as to make his statement the more indisputable. We are sure he might, and we think he would, have spoken of that belief as being still dominant in the third century, if not later still. Well, then, the word “speedy” would, to believers of the third century, be consistent with a delay of near three hundred years; for let us remember that the starting-point for the race whose speed we are considering is always the same, viz., at the crucifixion, or thereabouts. *Speed* and *nearness* are very relative ideas. The speed of the swiftest human runner, however astonishing in itself, would be considered very slow for an express train, while the speed of an express train is as that of a tortoise compared with the rate at which a star moves in its orbit or light travels through space. It is a long way to a place ten miles off—a long way to walk, at any rate—but if the sun or even the moon were only one hundred times as far from the earth we would say it was very awfully and unpleasantly near at hand. Now, supposing that our Lord had said while on earth—as we are not aware that He did—what He afterwards said from heaven to St. John at Patmos: “Behold, I come quickly,” we must remember what St. Peter, or whoever Professor Huxley supposes was the writer of 2 Peter iii. 8, has taught us, that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” “This one thing” which, even if no Apostle or prophet of that day had bid us

specially bear it in mind, we ought to have made out for ourselves—it is as old as the time of Moses (cf. Psa. xc. 4)—“this one thing” left out of Professor Huxley’s arithmetic makes all his calculation a mistake, and makes the result he arrives at “a prodigious error” of his own. “This one thing” that St. Peter reminds us of utterly nullifies that “one thing” which “is quite certain” in Professor Huxley’s Agnostic creed. It comes most satisfactorily to our aid when we are tempted to think that in such expressions as “The Lord is at hand,” “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh,” “Behold, I come quickly,” there is any exaggeration of language inconsistent with the strictest veracity of a divinely-inspired statement of truth.

But in the Synoptic Gospels, to which Professor Huxley specially appeals in support of his position, there are recorded certain sayings of our Lord’s which seem to show that there was present to His mind the possibility that His coming might be much more distant in time than other words of His might have warranted His disciples in thinking. He contemplates such a possible delay in His coming as would lead ill-disposed servants of His to give up watching, and take to a life of self-indulgence as regards themselves, and of violence and abuse of power towards others. His Parable of the Ten Virgins is a prediction of the time coming when the hope of His speedy coming would cease to dominate the lives of many professing Christians. And St. Peter’s teaching about mockers coming in the last days, saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” seems given by him as an echo of “the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your Apostles.” We consider that such language as we now allude to is inconsistent with the notion that our Lord taught the *belief* that His second coming *would* be speedy, as men count speed in ordinary matters; though it did not preclude the *hope* on the part of His disciples that it *might* even so be speedy.

Nothing, we believe, was, in the wisdom of God, allowed to preclude that hope, or to prevent its dominating Christian lives from year to year and from generation to generation. But nothing was said to authorize the belief that it would be fulfilled in any present or particular year, or in any present or particular generation.

II. We come now to consider what we have made a second and a separate count in the unbeliever’s indictment of our Second Advent hope, as framed from our Lord’s words in Matt. xvi. 27, 28; xxiv. 34—as also from St. Paul’s words in 1 Thess. iv. 15-18—and their real or apparent non-fulfilment. It is probable that those words were in Professor Huxley’s mind when he wrote as we have quoted above, and that they more than

any others, or than all others put together, produced in his mind the impression to which he has given such aggressive utterance.

(1) Mr. Laing makes no doubt but that in Matt. xvi. 28 our Lord refers directly and absolutely to His yet future second coming. That in some sense His words in that verse do refer to that we have no doubt, but we have just as little that they refer immediately to the Transfiguration vision which took place on the eighth day after, and which is recorded immediately after in all three Synoptic Gospels—that they refer to it as a vision and a foretaste of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. St. Peter himself (2 Peter i. 16-19), who was one of the chosen witnesses of the Transfiguration, gives that very account of it. Bishop Horsley, in a published sermon on Matt. xvi. 28, gives a very ingenious and original, not to say fantastic, explanation of it. He refers the saying to Judas Iscariot and his yet future “doom to endless sufferings, in comparison with which the previous pangs of natural death are nothing.” But the learned Bishop admits in the same discourse that “many expositors, both ancient and modern, by ‘the coming of the Son of Man’ in this text, have understood the Transfiguration.” He admits “that the Apostles who were permitted to be present (at the Transfiguration) might be said to have seen the Son of Man at that time coming in His kingdom; and it must be confessed that no violence is done to the phrase of ‘the coming of the Son of Man,’ considered in itself, in this interpretation.” Bishop Wordsworth holds that the prophecy of verse 28 “had a progressive and expansive character. It unfolded itself *by degrees* and at intervals; it has put forth buds and blossoms, but it will not be in its full bloom of accomplishment till the great day. Its first *germination* was in what immediately follows, viz., the Transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 1-5) . . . its full manifestation will be at our Lord’s *second coming* in glory for the *universal judgment*.” As for this “its full manifestation,” those who shall not taste of death till then or ever are Christ’s true and steadfast disciples (cf. John viii. 52). Dean Alford gives a somewhat similar explanation. We confess we are disposed to limit the meaning of the verse to what Wordsworth considers “its first germination.” We are abundantly satisfied with this obvious and ancient—we may say Apostolic—explanation. The Transfiguration, looked at in that point of view, is deeply interesting and instructive. Mr. Laing’s ignorance, or ignoring, of that explanation of Matt. xvi. 28 puts his argument from it quite on a par with his two other arguments against the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures. His assertion that St. Paul’s words in 1 Thess. iv. 15-18 are “the most distinct prediction possible . .

of the limit of time within which it (the Second Advent) was to take place" is hardly worth serious notice. Any thoughtful and intelligent reader of the New Testament will recognise the propriety of St. Paul identifying himself and his readers in faith and hope with those "that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord." They were members of a corporation that lives on from generation to generation. Any intelligent Christian of the present day would readily and naturally use St. Paul's very words on the subject, even though fully aware of the possibility of the coming of the Lord being delayed for centuries to come.¹

(2) But it is otherwise with the use made of our Lord's words recorded in Matt. xxiv. 34, by Gibbon and Mr. Voysey, if not also by Mr. Laing and Professor Huxley as well. We readily and sorrowfully admit that they have much excuse in using those words, with the context in which they stand, as they do. A stumbling-block has been put in their way, over which they have very naturally fallen into a very serious and grievous mistake. We would fain remove that stumbling-block out of their way and that of many others.

¹ A new departure in rationalism, not to say unbelief, has been taken on this subject by Mr. J. E. Carpenter, of Manchester New College, to the entire satisfaction of Mrs. Humphry Ward, in his "First Three Gospels: their Origin and Relation." "Nothing," says Mrs. Ward (in the *Nineteenth Century* for April last), "can be more interesting, and in some ways more original, than the treatment of the question, 'Did Jesus apply to Himself the title of Son of Man? What is the meaning of "the coming of the Son of Man"?' After a careful review of the whole evidence, Mr. Carpenter comes to the startling conclusion that in a large number of passages where the 'coming of the Son of Man' is spoken of '*Jesus intended to draw a clear distinction between Himself and His own function, and the event which He designated by this emblematic sense*' (sic; query scene). The contention of Mr. Carpenter . . . is that the 'coming of the Son of Man' is really equivalent to 'the coming of the kingdom of God'—in its present state and phase—and that Jesus Himself so conceived it; that His language on the point was misunderstood in the familiar manner of the time; and that the phrase in Daniel, 'become individualized and personally Messianic,' was freely applied to Jesus by His followers, and then crept into a number of His most characteristic sayings, where the substance is His but the form is the disciples' . . . in those sayings where the Master seems to apply the term 'Son of Man' to Himself—always in the third person, be it observed—we have the language of the Church transforming the language of the original speaker. There is no doubt that such an interpretation clears away from the memory of Jesus many passages in which the ideas expressed are wholly 'unlike the sayings in which Christendom has found the finest expressions of the Master's spirit.'" So we are asked by Mr. Carpenter, in a strange confounding of things that differ—of the present with the future, of the imperfect present with the power and glory of the future—"When the Son of Man sends forth His angels with a great trumpet blast (Matt. xxiv. 31), what resemblance is there in this vast scenic display to the sower scattering the seed, or the

We are aware of the various and contradictory explanations of "this generation," and attempted solutions of the difficulty of the whole passage in question; such as Dean Alford's making ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆς mean "this race," *i.e.*, "the Jewish race"; Chrysostom's suggestion, followed by Bishop Wordsworth, that it means "the generation of them that seek the Lord;" Dr. Robinson, of the "Gospel Harmony" (and many with him), making it mean the generation then living, but making "all these things be fulfilled" in the destruction of Jerusalem thirty-seven years afterwards; though he admits that "the full accomplishment took place perhaps fifty years later under Adrian," the coming of the Son of Man in power and great glory not being one of "these things" at all.¹

We do not wonder at such men as Gibbon and Huxley disdain to notice, and so utterly ignoring, such explanations as these must seem to them. We would not like to have to defend our Lord's veracity or that of His Apostles and Evangelists behind any one of them before such assailants.

But there is a solution of the whole difficulty which seems to us very simple and very obvious, which is open to no reasonable objection that such assailants would be likely to raise, while it completely neutralizes their arguments so far as that passage is concerned, which we suspect is the one on which they chiefly rely in this matter.

It is simply to make the words "this generation" mean "the generation living at the time I am speaking of," instead of "the generation living at the time I am speaking *in*"—mean, in fact, "that generation"; our Lord using the common figure of speech called *prolepsis*, which He undeniably does use twice besides in this and another very similar discourse.² In Luke

leaven silently at work within the dough? When we hear of the lightning flashing through the sky, we ask if this fell from the lips which declared 'the kingdom of God is within you.' Amid the marvels of heaven and earth, distress of nations, and the raging sea, who could 'receive the kingdom of God as a little child'?"

¹ So we find Mr. R. F. Horton testifying in "Inspiration and the Bible": "From the Apostolic teaching such as that contained in 2 Thess. ii. 1-12, and implied in the reported discourses of Jesus, and the closing chapter of the Apocalypse, the first generation of Christians expected an immediate Parousia, or appearance and presence of the risen Christ. Very few, possibly none, saw that the expectation was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D., though an expressly recorded saying of Jesus (Matt. xxiv. 34) might have led them to that conclusion. The expectation of the second coming lingered and gave to the Christian Churches a feeling that the time was short," etc. (p. 107).

² This mode of meeting the difficulty of Matt. xxiv. 34, was first suggested to the writer's mind in a form which was in itself untenable. It was thought that reading ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆς instead of ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆς might give "the same generation" instead of "this generation." This was very

xxi. 22 we read: "For *these* be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled," *i.e.*, "the days yet future that I am speaking of." They are called "those days," without any *prolepsis*, in the next verse. Again, in Luke xvii. 34, we read, "in *that* night," but it is literally "in *this* night" — ταύτη τῇ νυκτί. Our Lord, however, spoke proleptically, and so He meant, as all allow and all translate, "in that night." It is not so absolutely certain, and so we do not rely on it, but it is very probable, and so we mention it, as another case of *prolepsis* in the same discourse on the Mount of Olives, that "to *this* time" in Matt. xxiv. 21, and Mark xiii. 19, means "to that time," the time then future when the great tribulation spoken of would take place. Our contention is that in Matt. xxiv. 34, as certainly in Luke xvii. 34, and xxi. 22, and as probably in Matt. xxiv. 21, our Lord spoke proleptically, and though He said "this generation" He meant "that generation," teaching that when the signs of His coming came to pass, or began to come to pass, His coming would then be nigh at hand and He Himself at the doors; that the signs and the coming would take place in the lifetime, in possibly a short space of the lifetime, of one and the same generation. Besides ridding the whole passage of a great and distressing difficulty, it seems to us that this interpretation of our Lord's words in Matt. xxiv. 34 is imperatively demanded by the immediately preceding parable of the fig-tree, the teaching of which they, if so understood, corroborate and enforce, as they were evidently meant to do; while on any other understanding of them they seem to have little or no connection with the parable, if they do not even contradict its teaching. It gives, too, what our Lord appointed as signs of His coming, the true character of signs, a character which is utterly destroyed by centuries elapsing between them and the event of which they are the harbingers.

The Epistle of Barnabas was written about A.D. 75, shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem. He refers to that event in chapters iv. and xvi. And yet he evidently refers to the prophecy of Matt. xxiv. 15-31 as still unfulfilled. "The final trial approaches concerning which it is written, as Enoch says"—or as in the Latin, and, as seems more likely, "as Daniel says"—" 'For for this end the Lord hath cut short the times and the days, that His beloved may hasten, and He will come to the inheritance.' And the prophet also speaks thus: 'Ten king-

tempting, but was evidently quite untenable on grammatical grounds. "The same generation" would have required ἡ γενεὰ ἡ αὕτη. It is, however, quite unnecessary, the explanation put forward above being quite sufficient, being in effect the same in sense, while it is open to no such objection nor to any other, except, perhaps, that it favours one system of prophetic interpretation more than others. But every explanation must do that.

doms shall reign upon the earth, and a little king shall rise up after them, who shall subdue under one three of the kings." Hermas also, about A.D. 100, writes in his "Shepherd" (see Vision iv. throughout) of "the great tribulation," evidently quoting Matt. xxiv. 21, as still future. While Irenæus (A.D. 180) speaks of the "abomination of desolation" of Daniel and of the Mount of Olives discourse as identical with the predicted "beast" of the Revelation, whose number is 666, and as still future in his day. Evidently neither Barnabas, nor Hermas, nor Irenæus saw anything in Matt. xxiv. 15-32 fulfilled in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, or in any of the attendant circumstances of that catastrophe. They no doubt thought of another siege by nations and their armies which has yet to come to pass, as predicted by Zechariah, and in connection with which, as both Zechariah and our Lord have told us, the Advent in power and great glory will take place.

We submit that Barnabas and Hermas and Irenæus and the Church of their days must have understood "this generation" proleptically, as we have explained above, and as meaning "that generation." For, clearly, they did not understand it to mean the generation of which our Lord formed a part. That, they knew, had passed away and left, as they knew and acknowledged, a chief part, if not the whole, of "all these things" unfulfilled. Nor did they believe that they were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, which was past already, leaving the great and consummate tribulation and "the abomination of desolation" of Dan. ix. and Matt. xxiv. still to come to pass. Neither can we conceive of their supposing "this generation" to mean either "the Jewish race" (Alford, Wordsworth, etc.) or "the generation of them that seek the Lord" (Chrysostom and Wordsworth). Certainly they did not draw from Matt. xxiv. 34 any such belief of a speedy coming as Gibbon and Voysey, etc., suppose they were calculated to produce.¹

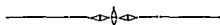
We would say, in conclusion, that we believe we stand in

¹ So we find to our great satisfaction the Rev. Charles Maitland, author of "The Apostles' School of Prophetic Interpretation" and of "The Church in the Catacombs," saying in the former work, p. 225: "The difficulty" as to "this generation" "appears not to have been felt by the primitive writers." *i.e.*, those before Chrysostom (A.D. 390), whose words, as quoted above, he has just noticed, "probably because they understood the *αἴρη* in the sense which it sometimes bears, 'this, of which I am speaking.' It is so used in Luke xvii. 34. 'In this night there shall be two in one bed,' meaning not this coming night, but this night of which I have been speaking." To avoid confusion, our translators have rendered it *that* night; they might also have rendered this passage *that* generation. This would make the sense easy, and in perfect accordance with the context. When these things begin to come to pass, when the fig-tree begins to bud, the end is close at hand, even within the life-time of the same generation.

exactly the same position in relation to the second coming of our Lord as was occupied by the Church of the first century. It is possibly very near to us, as it was possibly very near to them. The signs of it are still future to us as they were still future to them. Once they begin to come to pass they will soon elapse, and the coming will soon take place. The same generation will see the signs and the great event they presignify, will see the green shoots on the fig-tree of winter and the glorious summer they promise as nigh at hand.

And as the hope of the speedy coming "dominated the life of Christians" in the first century, so it ought to dominate our life and the life of every generation of Christians to the very end of the age. It ought to have dominated the life of all past generations of the Church. We cannot imagine a more wholesome influence for us to be dominated by, whether as a Church or as individual Christians. It would urge us on to the evangelization of the world, for "the Gospel must first be published among all nations," "in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." It would keep our lives unworldly in the best sense of that word, with our loins girded, and our lights burning, and ourselves as men that wait for their Lord; as those who "love His appearing," and who are therefore "looking for that blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

W. T. HOBSON.



ART. II.—THE THREE ABIDING GRACES, AS EXHIBITED IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS.¹

No. 2.—CHRISTIAN HOPE (IN PSALM LXXXVII).

EVER since there was an inspired Book man's attention has been constantly led onward to the things which God, through Christ, is preparing for the saved.

The Past has always had its sacred history; the Present has always had its seasonable guidance; and the Future has never been unfortold. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written," we are expressly told, "that we might have HOPE."

If, then, the eighty-seventh Psalm be reckoned, as it is generally reckoned, a song of hope for the refreshment of the

¹ The commencement of the series—No. 1, "Christian Faith (in Psalm xxxi.)"—appeared in THE CHURCHMAN for November. The conclusion—No. 3, "Christian Charity (in Psalm cxxxiii.)"—will appear in THE CHURCHMAN for January, 1891.