

*THE APOCALYPTIC ELEMENT IN OUR LORD'S  
TEACHING.*

THERE has been in the last few years a remarkable concentration of attention by theologians and scholars on the subject of our Lord's Eschatological Teaching. This has become, in the words of the Dean of St. Paul's, "The Storm Centre of Christian Apologetics." A large field of study has been opened up. Current beliefs among the Jews with regard to the Messianic Coming, popular conceptions and misconceptions among the early Christians about the Lord's Second Advent and the "Day of Judgment" and the so-called "end of the world" have all been carefully investigated.

Now there are several preliminary thoughts which we should do well to bear in mind in entering upon this study. First, let us realise the inadequacy of ordinary human language to deal with it. The Apocalyptic sayings of the Christ are an attempt to express in language which deals with things of sense and time, realities which transcend time and sense alike. Therefore, Apocalyptic sayings must of necessity be of the nature of hints, attempts rather to suggest than to portray, and the most suitable vehicle will be the parable. Hence also this kind of teaching will tend to acquire a technical vocabulary of its own and to have an esoteric meaning intelligible only to the few.

Perhaps the analogy may help us if we imagine a learned scientist trying to explain the mysteries of wireless telegraphy to some untutored aboriginal tribe. The teacher

would be confronted with the double difficulty of the crudity of his hearers' minds and the extremely limited nature of their vocabulary.

Yet how trifling such difficulties would be compared with the task which our Divine Lord set before Himself to translate into the language of time and sense, for the benefit of men to whom the phenomenal world alone seemed real, the great timeless spiritual truths of that eternal world in which His own consciousness was ever centred!

His sayings were constantly misinterpreted even by His Apostles, and He knew that they were misunderstood and left them unexplained. For He spoke for all ages. He left them as unintelligible as books are to babies waiting until man should be sufficiently developed to understand them. There is something sublime in the calm certainty of His tone, and the assurance of His emphatic words—as though He anticipated the confused thinking of later ages, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.” He spoke for all ages and His words can wait the development of the spiritual faculties by the aid of which alone they can be understood. From this point of view the popular opinions which prevailed in the primitive Church would seem to be comparatively unimportant as an aid to interpretation. Certainly they do not deserve the exaggerated importance [which many scholars insist on assigning to them. Neither in that age nor in any age is it reasonable to insist that the sayings of those who know “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” are to be interpreted according to the intelligence of those to whom “all these things are in parables.”

The sayings of the Christ round which many misconceptions rapidly gathered have been persistently interpreted in the light—if we can call it light—of these misconceptions, and many critics have read the popular belief in an immedi-

ate Parousia into the words of the Master, until some ordinarily cautious and conservative writers have come to assume that the Christ Himself entertained an expectation that failed.

But if it is important to ascertain the standpoint of those to whom the words were spoken, it is surely far more necessary to make every effort to discover the standpoint of the Speaker, and this has not received the attention it deserves. Of course it is just here that mere scholarship fails us—or at least it must in this study take quite definitely a second place, and mystical insight must be our main guide. “In this discussion,” says Professor Denney, “the babes have the better of the philosophers.”

Let us pause for a moment on this thought of the standpoint of the Speaker. “I came forth,” He says, “from the Father and am come into the world. Again I leave the world and go unto the Father.” There is movement, then, but no geographical movement—no movement in the three dimensions we know. God is no more “above the bright blue sky” than beneath the deep blue sea. Let us start from that great saying of St. Bonaventura,

*“God, who has His centre everywhere, and His circumference nowhere.”*

The dense is always interpenetrated by the less dense, and as we think of the physical world interpenetrated by ether so we can think of ether as interpenetrated by still subtler media till we come to pure spirit—to God who “filleteth”—interpenetrates all.

“The God I know of I shall ne'er  
 Know though He dwell exceeding nigh,  
 Cleave thou the wood and I am there,  
 Raise thou the stone and there am I,  
 Yea, in my life His Spirit doth flow  
 Too near—too far—for me to know.”

If we can realise that as ether, which is the medium of the vibrations of light, interpenetrates air, so it is interpenetrated by still finer forms of matter which are the media of emotional waves or waves of thought, then perhaps we may think that the discussions of the schoolmen as to the number of angels who could stand on the point of a needle is not so insane as its sounds. There is a real *point* in it.

And as we pass in thought from the dense earth with its coarse vibrations to the subtler vibrations of air, and ether, emotion and thought—in and in till we come to the central stillness—the conscious Bliss and Peace and Love which is God—we have found a new dimension and a new direction. In the light of that let us read again :

“I came forth from the Father and am come into the world.  
Again I leave the world and go unto the Father.”

“He ascended that He might fill (interpenetrate) all things,”  
and so come nearer to all.

“I go away and I come unto you.” (R.V.)

“Ah, yes,” say nervous theologians, “let us accept by all means the doctrine of Immanence, but let us not forget to balance it by the opposite doctrine of Transcendence—otherwise we shall fall into the errors of Pantheism and think of God as limited by the universe which He has made.”

Now if we put away the childish idea that Transcendence means geographical removal we shall see that it is not an opposing or balancing doctrine to the doctrine of Immanence, but a continuation of it.

We can only reach the true idea of transcendence *through* Immanence and—so to speak—out on the other side.

That is the idea contained in Chesterton's striking poem “The Holy of Holies,” which I shall venture to quote in full :

“Elder Father, though thine eyes  
Shine with hoary mysteries,  
Canst thou tell what in the heart  
Of a cowslip blossom lies ?

Smaller than all lives that be,  
 Secret as the deepest sea,  
 Stands a little house of seeds  
 Like an elfin's granary.

Speller of the stones and weeds,  
 Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds,  
 Tell me what is in the heart  
 Of the smallest of the seeds ?

God Almighty, and with Him  
 Cherubim and Seraphim,  
 Filling all eternity—  
 Adonai Elohim !”

“Filling all Eternity.” What more can the most enthusiastic believer in Transcendence want than that ?

The less dense not only interpenetrates the dense, but transcends it. It is never identified with it or limited by it.

Ether is present in every particle of matter, yet ether extends beyond the world and embraces the stars.

And so we can accept Faber's sayings :

“Out beyond the shining of the furthest star  
 Thou art ever stretching—infinately far ;  
 Yet the hearts of children hold what worlds cannot,  
 And the God of wonders loves the lowly spot.”

“God is never far enough away to be even near.”

Now starting from this thought we can see that there are two opposite standpoints from which we can look.

From the earth-side with the consciousness centred in the physical we see first things or actions, then more remotely the feelings or emotions behind them, and further off still the thoughts in which they originated. From the spiritual or Heaven-side we should see in just the reverse order. The focus would be completely changed. Then the thought would be more visible than the feeling and the action more remote than either.

If we grasp this I think we have the key to Apocalyptic teaching. Let me take an illustration from the fourth

chapter of the Book of Revelation. From the earth standpoint the normal order of vision would be, first, the things of nature, then the living forces behind them; later on we should dimly reach the thought of great intelligent controlling powers and finally arrive at the idea of God. But St. John is "in the spirit" and he sees in exactly the reverse order. First he sees the throne of God and Him who sits thereon, then the great Angelic Powers who rule the world for Him, the four and twenty Elders, then the living forces of nature symbolised by the four Living Creatures, and last of all the Creation itself—the "sea of glass."

Now let us return with this key in our hand to the account given in the synoptic Gospels of the discourse upon the Mount of Olives in answer to the question "When shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy Coming and of the consummation of the age?" In this connexion it is difficult to speak with patience of the culpable weakness of the revisers in allowing the monstrous mistranslation of *συντελεία τῶν αἰώνος* as "the end of the world" to remain in the text. It is not too much to say that the thought of Christians (including scholars) has been poisoned by the assumption that in this discourse our Lord is referring to the end of the world. Yet eminent scholars allow themselves to be led by the facility of a familiar and mistranslated phrase to assume that the Parousia involves the end of all things earthly. As a matter of fact the winding up of an age, the close of an epoch, which is all that the words imply, has no necessary connexion with "the end of the world." Ages have closed and civilisations been brought to an end again and again in the past, and the same process may be repeated again and again in the future. We shall never understand our Lord's Apocalyptic sayings till we cease to read them through the glare and haze of the *Dies Irae*, and learn to attach no more than their intrinsic value to the opinions of

the *σάρκικοι* of the primitive Church, and to banish what we know is a mistranslation, if not out of the Bible, at least out of our minds.

There have been many "great and terrible days of the Lord" in the history of mankind, days of judgment in which the accumulated evil of the age at length bursts into flame and is burnt out in suffering; "benignant fever paroxysms" which pass and leave humanity prostrate but purified.

Such a day of judgment—not to go far from our own times—was the French Revolution—when the explosive material to which every groan of the hungry and oppressed under that gilded and corrupt civilisation had contributed at length caught fire and smote the earth with a curse.

"Down came the storm! O'er France it passed  
 In sheets of scathing fire.  
 All Europe felt the fiery blast,  
 And shook as it rushed by her.  
 Down came the storm! In ruins fell  
 The worn out world we knew,  
 It passed, that elemental swell,  
 Again, appeared the blue,"

Such a "great and terrible day of the Lord" at the time when the Christ spoke His warning words was quickly drawing nigh to bring to a close in fire and blood the long age of Israel's probation; and its bitter obstinacy, its stoning of the prophets, and all the righteous blood that had been shed while the age lasted was to be required of that generation.

But all this has nothing to do with "the end of the world." It is among the pangs in which an old age perishes that a new age is born, and the world still goes on. "Et pur si muove," as Galileo said. Yet it is not without warning that epochs are so brought to a close. It was a matter of wonder to our Lord that even the Pharisees were unable to recognise the signs of the approaching doom. "Ye know how to discern the face of the heaven," He said, "but

ye cannot discern the signs of the time." Nor is it necessary that progress should always be by overthrow, nor need these great days of the Lord always smite the earth with a curse. It is when an age is closing on a society rent by fissures deep and wide, when the hearts of rulers and ruled are estranged, when the hearts of the fathers are turned from the children and the hearts of the children from the fathers, that these days of visitation which might have witnessed an orderly and majestic evolution bring instead a period of dreadful reckoning, of violence and destruction.

Perhaps this may seem too long a digression to hunt out one particular error, but I am convinced that so long as it dominates the situation thinking on our Lord's Apocalyptic teaching must remain hopelessly confused.

Let me give one or two examples of the way in which well-known thinkers have allowed themselves to be entangled by this error.

"So wise a man as the late Henry Sidgwick," said Bishop Gore at a recent Church Congress, "was alienated from the faith and membership of the Christian Church mainly by the conviction that Jesus Christ had certainly proclaimed the immediate coming of the end of the world and that it had not come as He prophesied. Jesus, he thought, was certainly under a delusion, and could not therefore be what Christendom believed Him to be."

Professor Denney speaks in very guarded language, and yet his meaning is not doubtful. "When all qualifications are made," he writes, "it is impossible for any candid reader to get rid of the fact that Jesus conceived the triumph of the Kingdom to come with His own Coming in glory, and that He spoke of it as so near that the very people whom He addressed must be in constant readiness for it."

And again, "Jesus knew that the powers of the world to come were present in Him, and that the coming of the



Kingdom was sure. God would triumph, and God's triumph would be His ; He had no doubt of that. But God's triumph was not only sure ; to the spirit of Jesus, who laid down His life for it, it was urgent ; it *could* not be delayed ; *adhuc enim modicum aliquantulum*, yet a little, ever so little, while, and He that cometh shall come. Does it change our attitude to Jesus to think of Him thus ? Are we the less able, or the less willing, to call Him Lord when we realise that in the days of His flesh He walked by faith, and that the assurance of His triumph, and of God's triumph in Him—in which all history is His justification—did not enable Him to hold up to His disciples a mirror in which the course of history could be foreseen ? In substance His words are true, but as in all prophecy the form is inadequate to the substance ; and this state of the case must simply be recognised."

"The most important thing about the Second Advent in the New Testament is that in its dated and spectacular form it disappears. The last of our Gospels, which is ascribed not only by uniform Christian tradition, but by its own unequivocal testimony, to the disciple whom Jesus loved, has nothing to say of it. It was written when the Church had not only known, but, in this great spirit at least, outlived all its embarrassments about the delay of the advent. The eschatological hopes of the earlier Gospels are not simply omitted in John ; they are replaced. Instead of the Apocalyptic discourses of Jesus, as at the close of Matthew and Mark, we have the intimate discourses of the upper room. Instead of a coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, we have the coming of the Spirit, the alter ego of Jesus, into the souls of believers. The evangelist takes it for granted that in this substitution of a spiritual for an outward coming he is true to the mind of the Master. He does indeed speak words which refer to the resurrection of Jesus, to His appearing to His own, and to a final day of judgment : but

substantially the speedy triumph of which Jesus spoke in apocalyptic language resolved itself for Him into the victory of the Spirit over the world."

He speaks of this as a "bold transmutation of the predictions of Jesus which was forced on the evangelist by the teaching of events and by the Spirit."

The Bishop of Ossory seeks to break out of the snare in another direction.

"Did Christ," he asks, "expect an immediate Parousia? His disciples, after His Ascension, did apparently anticipate His speedy return, and they were wrong. But did He not expect that His Messianic vindication was near at hand, even in the days of His public ministry? How are we to deal with such passages as 'Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come,' and 'There be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom'? I will say quite frankly that if we had no report of the Lord's words but that in St. Matthew there would be no escape from the conclusion that in these sayings He anticipated a manifestation of the Son of Man, which, in fact, did not take place. There was no such manifestation before the disciples returned from their mission, nor did any of them see the Son of Man coming with power. But no principle of Synoptic criticism is better established than this, that Matthew is a secondary authority as compared with Mark. When the same thing is reported by both, Mark is the original source which Matthew has edited. Now take the last quoted saying as it appears in Mark—'There be some here which shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come with power.' There is not a word about the Son of Man; it is the coming of the Kingdom that is spoken of, and he would be a bold interpreter who would deny that this was fulfilled at Pentecost. Or, again, examine the context

in Matthew of the saying about the disciples going through the cities of Israel. It follows a prediction of tribulations. Where does that prediction appear in Mark? Not at all in reference to the mission of the Twelve, but in the Apocalyptic discourse spoken before the Passion. Whatever the original form of St. Matthew x. 23 may have been, it was not spoken, unless Synoptic criticism is wholly at fault, in connexion with the preliminary excursion of the Apostles. I do not know a more striking illustration of the gains that New Testament criticism has brought to us than is suggested here. An examination of the internal relations between St. Matthew and St. Mark disposes of the perplexity which such sayings of Christ as those just quoted present in their Matthaean context. When reference is made to St. Mark there is seen to be no ground whatever for the suggestion that they imply an expectation on the part of Christ of a glorious manifestation of Himself in judgment in the immediate or the near future. The Apocalyptic discourse of St. Mark xiii., in which the Fall of Jerusalem and the end of all things are both discussed, presents a difficulty which cannot be thus explained, as every reader of the Gospel knows. I must leave it for discussion by those who follow me, and I will only say this about it—the report of this discourse is obviously so much abbreviated that there can be no question of verbal precision in the record; and hence the exact context of the words, ‘This generation shall not pass away until all these things be accomplished,’ cannot be certainly established.”

The difficulty which forces Professor Denney to regard the predictions of Jesus as needing to be “boldly transmuted” forces the Bishop of Ossory to rely for his solution on the misplacement of a verse in St. Mark as well as a mistaken quotation in St. Matthew.

Once again so careful a scholar as Dr. Swete, commenting on the words from Revelation about “the trial which is

coming on the whole habitable earth," writes: "i.e., the troublous times which precede the Parousia. In the fore-shortened view of the future which was taken by the apostolic age this final sifting of mankind was near at hand, not being yet clearly differentiated from the imperial persecution which had already begun." Now what authority has Dr. Swete for reading "final" into the prophecy? Why should he assume that a "coming" of the Christ necessarily implies "the end of the world"? It is the old error lying at the back of all these wrestlings with the text—the habit of assuming that our Lord meant His sayings to be interpreted by the not very enlightened minds of the first Christian communities; as if we had any right to expect that they were entirely free from those persistent tendencies to secularise spiritual sayings for which our Lord was continually rebuking His Apostles.

I would humbly suggest that, regarded apart from this distorting medium, there is not one word which justifies us in thinking that either the Christ or those Apostles who heard Him believed in His immediate visible return to the world after His Ascension. Certainly S. Paul in his earlier writings appears to share the popular belief, though later on he gains a truer perspective.

Let me take an example of the way in which sayings seem to me to have been altogether misapplied.

There are no words which have been more generally taken to refer to the Second Coming of our Lord than those in the first chapter of the Apocalypse.

"Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him; and they also that pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so. Amen."

Yet I think if we can break away from the traditional attitude we may see that St. John in these words is looking back on the first Advent; for he is quoting musingly two passages

from the Old Testament, blending and applying them, repeating them in view of his own experience.

"Behold He cometh with clouds" (so says Daniel), and every eye shall see Him.

"They shall look on Me," (says Zechariah), "whom they pierced."

How true! How wonderfully it has all been fulfilled. Yes—every eye shall see Him and they also that pierced Him.

"With clouds," *veiled, that is, from worldly sight.* The writer of Daniel and St. John after him are using technical Apocalyptic language. "With clouds"; how wonderfully applicable to His First Coming!

We can think of the clouds as rent indeed for a moment to the eyes of the shepherds of Bethlehem—rent for a moment when the star shows through that "led on the grey-haired wisdom of the East," but at Nazareth they closed over Him again. So as He begins His Ministry men ask, "Is not this the carpenter?" He comes with clouds. So it was designed—He does mighty works, yet He says, "See thou tell no man"—"He straitly charged them that they should not make Him known." The Pharisees demand a coming "with observation"—they want a sign from heaven, and He sighs deeply and leaves them. He draws the veiling clouds round Him. He will not disperse them, nor suffer them to be dispersed. Shortly before His Crucifixion He lays upon His future preachers the solemn charge that they should "tell no man that He was the Christ."

"Behold, He cometh"—He ever cometh—not "with observation," but "with clouds." Physical eyesight cannot pierce them, clever intellect cannot pierce them, but intuition, faith, spiritual vision can.

We think of another scene when the Master asks His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" and St. Peter answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," and we notice the joy with which He welcomes this evidence of the

faculty of mystical insight in His follower. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee"—the clouds are still there, but faith has pierced them. "Now I can begin to build My Church. Your answer," He seems to say, "shews the development of a faculty in that part of your being which is beyond the reach of death."

So we understand the deep *Nal ἀμῆν* of St. John as he musingly dwells on the words of the prophets with his eyes on his own memories of the Incarnate Life.

"Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen." He sees the deep penitence all down the ages as the meaning of the eternal sacrifice dawns on generation after generation.

Similarly, let us take those words which the Bishop of Ossory throws overboard to lighten the ship—our Lord tells His disciples that ere that generation had passed away they should see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

These words also have strangely been taken to refer to the Second Coming, but surely that is a mistake. "What shall be the sign of Thy Coming?" they had asked. We know that when they asked it they did not for a moment expect the great eclipse of Calvary, to be followed by the Resurrection and Ascension. They believed, and rightly, that the age was near its close and that their Master was to be "manifested to the world." But they altogether misunderstood the manner in which He would reveal Himself. "By Thy Coming" they clearly meant "Thy manifestation"<sup>1</sup> They were far indeed from thinking then of a Second Coming.

In this same sense we understand Our Lord's saying, "Ye

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Lord, what is come to pass, that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us and not to the world?" (St. John xiv. 22).

shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come." So in answer to their question, which, as we have seen, had nothing whatever to do with a Second Advent, our Lord replies in the traditional language of Messianic prophecy and tells them that ere that generation passed away they should "see the Son of Man coming in clouds with power and great glory."

Notice how different the meaning of these words is when interpreted from the standpoint of Earth and from the standpoint of Heaven.

By "clouds" does our Lord mean a congregation of vapours, or does He use the word as the symbol of that which veils?

By "Power" is He referring to power like that wielded by Pontius Pilate—"power to crucify," or to the power of the pierced Hands—the power to be crucified?

"He had rays coming out of His Hands, and there was the hiding of His power."

And what is glory? Is it the tinsel flash of earthly splendour? Or is it manifestation of the going forth of Love? "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory that I had with Thee before the world was." Let the going forth of Thy love (i.e.) be made manifest through this mortal Body." And the answer to that prayer was the Crucifixion.

*Tu Rex gloriae, Christe!*

St. John The Baptist's conception of the First Coming is extraordinarily like the popular conception of the Second, which prevails to-day. He accepted the traditional belief. He identified Jesus with the Messiah, and he watched and waited and expected. When would He "come"? When would He appear in clouds of light and splendour? When would He assume His power and manifest His glory?

In his prison we can imagine how he eagerly questioned

his disciples as to the attitude of the authorities and to the populace—What is He doing? Going from place to place, they tell him, “teaching, healing, casting out demons.” “Then is the Messiah,” he thinks, “a still later comer?” Are the clouds and the power and the glory to belong to another and is Jesus just carrying on my work of preparation? So he sends his message, “Art Thou He that cometh or look we for another?” (note the use of the word “cometh”). And the men deliver their message and then, like orientals, wait while the Master teaches and heals.

Then His answer in effect is this, “Do not clouds surround Me? Is not power going forth from Me and manifested love? Is not the sign of My true Kingship the number whom I can help and serve? The world does not understand this, but the spiritually-minded will see, and “Blessed is he who shall not be offended in Me.”

We can imagine the effect on St. John. It is “not with observation” then! Silently—unrealised—the Coming will soon have taken place! So He came in a cloud with power and great glory—so when their eyes were opened His followers saw, and ere the nation realised it was judged. We look forward to a Second Coming of our Lord. What are our conceptions of “clouds” and “power” and “glory”? Have we not, like the Jews, and like the Baptist, and the disciples, materialised them? Have we not, as they did, surrounded the thought of the Coming with all kinds of crude, material interpretations of spiritual figures till—if He should appear to His world, as He did 1900 years ago to the Jewish nation, unbelief would be demanding the expected visible “signs from Heaven,” and worldliness and prejudice would be as blind as then, and the world, like Israel long ago, would be judged ere it knew.

“Tell us, when shall these things be (the overthrow of the Temple), and what shall be the sign of Thy Coming and of the Consummation of the Age?”



It was a comprehensive question, and Our Lord's reply looks as if it might be divided into three distinct parts. He gives first in general terms the signs by which the close of an age may be recognised. Then He gives His followers the immediate signs of the closing of that particular age, and finally He answers the question as to the signs of His own Coming (not His Second Coming, let us note; they had no thought of that—but of His manifestation).

Generally the signs which herald and accompany the close of an age are excitement and tumult, wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, and a widespread turbulence, which seem to indicate that some restraining power is being withdrawn.

When an age—or civilisation, as we call it—is beginning, progress is slow, century after century passes with little change and precedent is slowly added to precedent; but toward the close things begin to move with ever increasing rapidity. Men feel themselves borne along helplessly by forces and tendencies which they cannot control and toward issues which they can only dimly and fearfully descry. Our Lord sums up the experience in one graphic and suggestive phrase, "These things are the beginning of travail," the birth-pangs, that is, of the age that is to be.

Then naturally and inevitably He goes on to deal with the events which would precede and accompany the close of that particular age and of what we call the Jewish Dispensation. Accordingly He warns His followers when they see Jerusalem compassed about with armies to flee to the mountains, and specially He puts them on their guard against pretenders who in that time of fearful crisis should claim to be the Christ. In St. Matthew's account, a significant hint is added to this warning. They need not fear that there is danger to them of failing to recognise His Coming. To them there will be no possibility of mistake. "For as the light-

ning cometh forth from the East and shineth even to the West, so shall the Coming of the Son of Man be." His Call, that is, will be unmistakable to His own; whenever He may come, wherever they may be, they will hear and recognise His voice, but the world will not see that which is to them as plain and all-pervading as the lightning flash; and so He adds, "Wheresoever the carcase is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." It is amazing that a theologian like Chrysostom should so entirely miss the meaning of these words as to see in them a reference to the Eucharist, and hardly less astonishing that some more modern commentators have fancied there was some reference to the eagles upon the Roman standards! Surely the point of the hint is the keenness of the vultures' sight. A camel falls in the desert, and straightway from North and South and East and West the vultures, till then hidden in the far off blue of the sky, hasten to the prey, which they and they alone among the creatures have seen. They have eyes to see what to the rest is invisible. Even so His Coming, unrecognised by the world, is visible to all who spiritually have eyes to see. And what are we to make of the concluding part of the discourse which speaks of the darkening of the sun and moon and the falling of the stars and the vision of the Son of Man and the gathering of His elect? All is to take place "after that tribulation" (i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem) and before that generation should pass away.

I would suggest that not only this limitation of time but the nature of the words themselves would lead us to interpret them as referring, not to some future cataclysm in history, but to a transcendental experience which was literally fulfilled in the lifetime of some at least of those who heard them. Under the Master's training their spiritual faculties had been awakened and were rapidly developing, and the spiritual world was ready to burst upon their inner vision, just as the

world of colour waits to grow round the blind man whose eyes are being opened. Flashes of revelation, glimpses of truth, visions of spiritual realities begin to break in upon the awakening inner sight, showing that "He is nigh at the doors." The consciousness of the seer, hitherto centred in the phenomenal, begins to transcend it and to centre itself in the timeless and eternal, and the change is like witnessing the break-up of the world. To one whose inner eye is opened to the glow of "the light that never was by sea or land," all that has before seemed brightest—the sun that was the very symbol of brightness—grows dark by comparison; and compared with the glories of that eternal world the stars themselves—those shining, age-long symbols of permanence—are like so many autumn leaves cast from a tree. "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall be falling from heaven."

And then to the awakening spiritual sense there becomes visible the great continuous Coming of the Son of Man—the vision of "the Light that lighteth every man" coming like a great dawn into the world. The age-long truth is manifested of which the First Advent, as we call it, is but a reflexion under conditions of time and space, and along with this there is seen, when viewed from the Heaven side, the gathering together into one mighty host of God's elect who seem to earthly eyes so feeble and scattered and isolated. The nature of the vision is inevitable when we realise the change of standpoint.

"And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in clouds with power and great glory. And then shall He send forth the angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of the heaven."

H. ERSKINE HILL.