

The Thousand Years' Reign of Christ.

BY REV. G. W. SAMSON, D.D.

The Herald and Sun, the papers that are specially read by the masses in New York, have invited and published replies to Christian and Jewish inquiries, as to the special point of inquiry that brought together the "Prophetic Conference," so called in the Tribune's full report. Dr. Tyng was right in stating that the belief of Christendom, based on the repeated declaration of the New Testament that Christ will appear in bodily form as his disciples "saw him go into heaven." This generally received truth is quite distinct, however, from the opinion formed from a single passage (Rev. xx. 1-7), that Christ will thus come a "thousand years" before his final coming, and will reign all that period on earth in bodily form.

The Israelites, whose Rabbis, from Jerusalem to New York and Washington, have been personally met by the writer, are divided in opinion as to the coming of the Old Testament Messiah; the Orthodox thinking he will come as an earthly ruler, the Reformed believing that he is to be only a spiritual teacher. Hence the former are struck with the likeness of their view to that presented in the Prophetic Conference. Certainly, from Adam to Moses, 2,500 years, the promised Redeemer who manifests himself in Eden, to Abraham, and to Moses on Sinai, is but a spiritual revealer of truth. Certainly from Moses to Samuel, the early and best days of the Hebrew State, the idea of a "King" was abhorrent, and Moses represented the Messiah as a "prophet" only (Deut. xviii. 18). When in the degeneracy of the Hebrew people, a king was given, David spoke of the Messiah as a high priest (Ps. cx.) foretelling fully his sacrificial death (Ps. xxii. and lxxix), while the three prophetic pictures of him as a king (Ps. xl. xlv. lxxii.) are manifestly figurative, picturing a reign of "righteousness." Coming then to the third class of writers, the prophets, he is blind indeed who can see anything more than a spiritual Redeemer. Certainly any Jew must admit that down to David's day, the idea that their Messiah was to be an earthly ruler was never conceived. The Hebrews, therefore, who regard his coming as a king to be figurative, have all of their own scriptures, as well as the Christian world with them. And yet the view that Jesus was to be a civil ruler, so strong in the days of his coming that his own disciples were in error till after the ascension, was based on far stronger figurative statements than the single statement of the figurative Revelation; this old idea of the Jews is now based by the interpreters of the Conference. The essential inquiry lying at the foundation is this, what is the true interpretation of Rev. xx. 1-7?

The connection of truth in the gospel is all important. Matthew wrote his gospel, about A. D. 53. Shortly after the decision at Jerusalem (Acts xv.), for certainly it reveals truth only established among the apostles at that era. In the 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew, Christ speaks of three "comings" of the "Son of Man"; the first in "Providence," at the destruction of Jerusalem, (xxiv. 34.) and at individual death, (xxiv. 44, compare John xiv. 1-4); second in "grace," giving "oil" and "talents," to be improved, (xxv. 4-15); third, at the final judgment, (xxv. 31). Paul at the same era wrote first and second Thessalonians, in the former of which he spoke of the judgment (iv. 13-18) carefully reminding his readers that the time was unknown, (v. 1-4). Yet some misinterpreted his words; and Paul once for all, denied that he taught that the day of Christ was at hand, (2 Thess. ii. 1-3). In later epistles Paul speaks indeed of Christ's coming in providence as "at hand," (Rom. xiii. 12, and Phil. iv. 5); but Luke, who was Paul's companion most constantly, states new and most emphatic denials by Christ that he was to come as an earthly king; all his declarations centering in this, "The kingdom of God is within you." Peter, writing when Paul's epistles were generally read, speaks of the final judgment; seeming in his first epistle to speak of "that day" as "at hand," (1 Pet. iv. 7) but showing his real meaning in his second epistle (iii. 4-16). In this last utterance he is careful to state that mentions of years as connected with Christ's work are figurative; and he uses this strong expression, "Beloved, ye are not ignorant of this one thing—that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years." Fifteen years after Peter thus wrote under Nero, John under Domitian, wrote the Revelations, and made the statement, figurative of course, as all the book is, as to the "first" and

"second resurrection" (Rev. xx. 1-6), which has led to the idea of an earthly bodily reign of Christ for a literal thousand years. It is forgotten that fifteen years yet later, under Nerva, John wrote his gospel, in which the full interpretation of the first and second resurrections, is given in a series of selections from Christ's yet unrecorded sayings. To Nicodemus, (iii. 1-11) he spoke of the new birth as spiritual, and to the woman of Samaria (iv. 14-26) of the Messiah as a spiritual Redeemer. At Jerusalem (v. 21-29) he describes minutely the two resurrections, saying of the spiritual, "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live," and to illustrate this new doctrine he cites their old belief thus: "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming," he does not say "now is,"—"in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth." After repeated references of like nature to Martha, he says, "Thy brother shall rise again," and when she, showing the common belief, says, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day," Jesus replies: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." It would seem impossible that Jesus should have been more explicit in speaking of these two resurrections; and that John should have given clearer proof that out of Jesus' own lips he meant to explain his former figure of the first resurrection. Yet more; in his last address it is brought out that Christ's intimate association with his disciples in bodily form had hidden instead of revealing his nature and mission, his truth and his power; for though "so long a time with them," even Philip, the most spiritual inquirer, had not known him; and he could not be manifested (xiv. 7-24) until he had laid off the veil of the flesh.

How impossible then to conceive that on this round world, with its antipodes, where man's vision extends but a few feet, the bodily appearance of Christ is possible except when all his own are to be caught up into the heavens, there to be forever with the Lord." (1 Thes. iv. 13-18.) How improbable that any added manifestation of his spiritual excellence should thus be made when his flesh hid that excellence during his first abode on earth. How impossible that in the age when the outward display of chariots, thrones, sceptres and crowns is coming, through all nations, to be the emblem of physical, not of moral rule, the intelligent piety of the nineteenth century should admit to itself, after second thought any such interpretation of John's single figure in his vision.

Religion in These Days.

Man's place in nature has never been so sharply and profoundly questioned as it has been during the past ten years. The answer which science presumes to give when it presumes to give any, is not one which pleases or in any way satisfies itself. "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." Matter and force have manifested themselves in man, in form and phenomena, and the matter and force which have made man shall at last be resolved into the common stock, to be used over and over and over again, in other forms and phenomena. There is a body, but there is no such thing as a mind, independent of body. The dualism of constitution in which we have believed, and which lies at the basis of all our religion and philosophy, is a delusion. Out of all the enormous expenditure of ingenuity, or of what appears to be, or seems like, ingenuity, nothing is saved. The great field of star-mist out of which our solar system was made, has been hardened into planets, set in motion and filled with life, to go on for untold ages, and then to come to an end—possibly to become a field of star-mist again; and nothing is to be saved out of the common fund of matter and force that can go on in an independent immortal life. Man is simply a higher form of animal. God as a personality does not exist. Immortality is a dream, and the Christian religion is, of course, a delusion.

These conclusions seem to be the best that science can give us. Science believes nothing it cannot prove. There may be a personal God who takes cognizance of the personal affairs of men, but science cannot prove it, therefore a belief in a personal God is unscientific. There may be such a thing as the human soul—a spirit that has a life, or the possibilities of a life, independent of the body, but it cannot be proved. Indeed, it seems to be proved that all the phenomena of what we call mind are attributable to changes that take

place among the molecules of the brain. Therefore a belief in the human soul is unscientific. Of course if there is no human soul there is nothing to save; Christ was, consciously or unconsciously, an impostor and the hopes and expectations of all Christendom are in vain. And this is the highest conclusion to which science seems to be able to lead us. Can anything be imagined to be more lame and impotent? We should think that every laboratory, and every scientific school, every library and study of a man of science, would seem like a tomb.

That this attitude of prominent men of science toward the great questions which relate to God, immortality, the human soul, and the Christian religion, has sadly shaken the faith of a great multitude, there is no doubt. Society is honeycombed with infidelity. Men stagger in their pulpits with their load of difficulties and doubts. The theological seminaries have become shaky places, and faith has taken its flight from an uncounted number of souls, leaving them in a darkness and sadness that no words can describe. All this is true. So true that tears may well mingle in one's ink as he writes it; but after all, we have everything left that we ever possessed. Nothing has been proved against our faith. Science has never proved that there is no personal God, no soul, no immortality, no Christ, and these are matters that we have always taken on faith. Not only this, but these are questions which science is utterly incompetent to handle. They are outside the dominion of science. Science can no more touch them than it can touch anything that it confesses to be, unknowable.—J. G. Holland.

Preaching not to be Superseded.

Some tell us that that the press has superseded the pulpit; that men need no longer to be hearers, because they are readers. The Bible is in their hands; if they need any explanations, they have the works of the great commentators. Why listen to sermons of men of little experience and only average culture? But they forget the human element, the power of man over his fellow-men, the force derived from experience, the practical accompanying the ideal. True preaching, as I have said, is not merely the delivery of the message; but the delivery of the message by men who profess to have felt its power and testified to its truth in their own experience.

The preacher not only proclaims the truth; he stands as a personal witness to its power. What political party would go into an exciting canvass relying merely on articles from the press? The press is a valuable auxiliary. It reports the strongest thought of the eloquent theorist. But every party must have conventions, its evening meetings, stump speakers. Without these it fails. What would the temperance reformation be without speakers who themselves have been reformed? What would Murphy's influence be through the press alone? It is the man who was a drunkard, reduced to wretchedness, who was in jail when the work found him and elevated him, that the crowd go to hear. When that man stands before an audience and tells the story of his fall, his sorrow, his wretchedness, his repentance and reformation and triumph over appetite, the hearts of the people are stirred and many are moved to join the good cause. Who has not read the lectures of Gough? And yet, though he tells the same stories over and over, the largest auditoriums are crowded almost to overflowing to hear him. Wendell Phillips has been for thirty years hunting the lost arts. The synopsis of his lecture has been before the public again and again; yet people hasten and crowd to hear him. Some things never grow old. The songs our mothers sang to us in childhood are still the sweetest music to our ears. "Now I lay me down to sleep" was the evening prayer of Quincy Adams when he sat in the presidential chair.

The very men who say the pulpit is a failure and declare it to be superseded are themselves unwilling to trust to the press alone. The notorious Ingersoll, who denounces Christianity and denies the being of God, is unwilling to trust to his writings; but eagerly mounts the platform, and thus steals the livery of Heaven to serve the Devil in. Erasmus says: "The Devil preached." He preached to Eve and seduced the human race. Christian preaching shall never fail. The great Commander issued his orders of marching centuries on. He never changes His plans and will not be defeated. His order was "Go preach!" and this stands good until He comes again.—Bishop Simpson.

Theology and other Sciences.

How surpassingly rich is the field that is before any man who enters upon the investigation of the relations of Christianity or religion at large to science! All biological investigation lies before him as a vast prairie filled with billowing flowers. He is to seek not for every weed; but for the most significant and precious growths. Thus his task is less disproportioned to human strength than it would at first appear. Indeed, it is not his business to know the materia medica—that is not important to his specialty; but he must know the consummate flower of all philosophy as applied to biological investigation. Then there is the whole range of psychological study, now connecting itself closely with physiology. There is no blazing question in physiology or in biology that does not cast light into the theological domain. Political economy and social science are to be kept in view, for how can we discuss marriage and communism and democracy, or any of the large modern themes connected with free institutions, without knowing the best political thought of the world? Professor Hitchcock, at New York, lately told his classes that "of all collateral studies not one just now is of more immediate importance to theological students than political economy. The old Hebrew prophets, leaders of public opinion in their day and nation, were more than political economists. They were statesmen." ("Socialism," p. 52.) "Were they alive to-day, they would discuss socialism and know how to wield the newly forged thunderbolts of biology and psychology, as well as well as of political science.

Religious science proposes to look north, south, east and west, and never to be walled-eyed. Do skeptics and rationalists propose to do the same thing? American religious scholarship is not afraid of investigation, but founders lecturehips and professorships to meet you half way; and what do you find? "Where are your colleges? Where are your lectureships? Where are your great endowments? Where are your libraries? Where are your books one hundred years old? I put that question to the four winds, and obtain no answer."—Joseph Cook.

Missions in Rome.

Rev. W. C. Van Meter, says the Springfield Republican, that persistent and successful beggar for his independent mission "under the shadow of the Vatican," issues his annual appeal. He wants \$25 from 400 persons, Sunday-schools or churches, to run his mission, parlors, and reading rooms during 1879. Mr. Van Meter gives an interesting account of anti-Roman-Catholic matters. Rev. Dr. Vernon, American Methodist, spent his Summer in Rome "guarding his flock and watching the wolves." The Waldensians have got a lot and expect to open their church in March; Gavazzi has returned full of his old fire and looking younger; Dr. Phillips is at work among the Jews in the Ghetto; the Scotch Presbyterian Church is reopened by Rev. Dr. J. Murray Mitchell; Rev. Thomas Hamilton, First Rector of Trinity Episcopal church, has returned after an absence of five years, and the church is being filled with those who hate ritualism and love the gospel. Rev. Dr. Taylor (American Baptist) had his beautiful new church dedicated a few Sundays ago, and held a council of evangelists; Rev. Mr. Wall (English Baptist) has got a Roman Catholic Church at Tivoli, dedicated to St. Nicholas, and has whitewashed the saints painted on the wall—a piece of vandalism which Mr. Van Meter admires, saying: "When the whitewashing commenced the priest assured the people that St. Nicolo, the patron saint, would protect it. They crowded to see what the saint would do to the impious heretics. But when they saw the holy image covered with whitewash and the offenders remain unhurt, some said the saint that cannot protect his church and image is not able to help us. We are done with him. Adieu San Nicolo."

Condensation.

It is an old saying that "Brevity is the soul of wit." Some one suggests that brevity is the soul of worship also. Rev. C. H. Spurgeon characteristically remarks that he strongly objects to a brother praying for half an hour at a social meeting, and then winding up by asking the Lord to pardon their shortcomings! Depend upon it, protracted supplications savor of formality rather than of fervor. The homely English adage is true of the spiritual as well as of the secular. "Good stuff goes in little bundles." Rev. Samuel Newman, of Edinburgh, remarks that one result of

the revival effected through the agency of Moody and Sankey was this: Before that time prayers had been long and cold; after, they were short and earnest. Condensation aids edification.

Duty is a power which rises with us in the morning, and goes to rest with us at night. It is co-extensive with the action of our intelligence. It is the shadow which cleaves to us, go where we will, and which only leaves us when we leave the light of life.—Gladstone.

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