

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

The Apocalyptic of Jesus and the Church.

FOR most English readers Sanday's *Life of Christ in Recent Research* was the first intimation of the rise of a new school of historical criticism which found in the apocalyptic passages in the gospels the true key to an understanding of Jesus. Since then, mainly through the controversies associated with the names of Loisy, Tyrrell, and Schweitzer on the one side, and the definitely constructive work of Hogg, Cairns, Scott, Moffatt, and Manson, on the other, most have become familiar with its chief contention. Apart from extravagancies, it is that Jesus shared to the full the apocalyptic expectations of His age, that He announced the imminence of the Last Tribulation, the final Judgment, and the End of the World, and that He anticipated His own speedy return after death and on the clouds of heaven to reign in eternal glory. It was the nearness of these great events that was the "good news of the Kingdom" to a world in the last stages of dissolution; and as the ethical teaching of Jesus was based on this expectation, it was only provisional, an "interim ethic."

It needs hardly to be said that, though the exclusive emphasis laid upon the apocalyptic element in the gospels by this school is modern, the presence of that element has not been overlooked by scholars in the past. And if men like Welhausen would eliminate it as a foreign element intruded by the primitive Jewish Church, others, like that great master Keim long ago, have recognized its authenticity, and in various ways have attempted to explain it. Even when allowance is made for probable and even certain expansion and heightening in transmission, the apocalyptic utterances of our Lord are too integral to the gospels to be torn out, and they are not confined to such a passage as Mark xiii., but pervade the whole. And as Burkitt says, "Whatever we may think of Dr. Schweitzer's solution, or that of his opponents, we too have to reckon with the Son of Man who was expected to come before the apostles had gone over the cities of Israel, the Son of Man who would come in His kingdom before some

that heard our Lord should taste death, the Son of Man who came to give His life a ransom for many, whom they would see hereafter coming with the clouds of heaven."¹

The Eschatologists have done good service in compelling fresh consideration of such words, and in proving, as against a purely humanitarian liberalism, that Jesus did regard Himself as more and greater than a prophet and teacher who was no part of His own gospel. Yet it is not possible to recognize in their portrait of the Master anything but a distorted picture. It is not only or even mainly that there are many words of His concerning the Kingdom that are incompatible with the apocalyptic thesis, and that some of His greatest utterances such as the parables of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, and the Publican and the Pharisee in the Temple, have nothing to do with it. His actual work was on another plane. He said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost," but, except for the occasion, He need not have said it. It was the passion of His earthly ministry. His Messiahship was a secret reserved for a select circle, but His strength was devoted to preaching and healing among the masses of the people. He proclaimed the grace of the heavenly Father, and the dynamics of divine forgiveness and love. It was not the thunder-girt and stormy Jesus of the Eschatologists whose message was only of imminent and inevitable catastrophe, who impressed men with His serene wisdom, who had leisure for little children, who was so genial that outcasts and sinners were won by His warm friendliness, who so redeemed the lost by His presence and love that they washed His feet with their tears, and who gave to His disciples as He has given to the world a new vision of God. Apocalyptic was not the main interest of such a Jesus, and if His Messiahship is to be interpreted by His life and works, it was Saviourhood. And it is not irrelevant to note that, although it is clear that the primitive church was inspired by apocalyptic hopes, the gradual fading of those hopes and their displacement by another and more spiritual outlook, did not mean and has not meant the loss of faith in Jesus or any diminution of His power, but rather the exaltation in the love and worship of His people.

Nevertheless, however it is to be explained, apocalyptic is so inwoven into the texture of the gospels as to be indubitably authentic. The phrases most often on our Lord's lips, "Kingdom of God," and "Son of Man," are both apocalyptic, and were not original with Him. They were taken over by Him from the apocalyptic of His time. Indeed,

¹ Preface to *Quest of Historical Jesus*, by Schweitzer, p. vi.

it is the attention that has been paid during recent years to the apocalyptic literature that has resulted in the eschatological interpretation of the gospels. It is seen that these particular utterances of Jesus do not stand alone, but attach themselves in form and contents to a mass of writings produced during the preceding two centuries, and extending into the first century of the Christian era. The great parable of the Son of Man coming in His glory to judge the nations, for example, though it is very different in spirit and motive, cannot be dissociated from the account of judgment given in the Book of Enoch, some of the very phrases of which it echoes.² And New Testament apocalyptic generally is not, and cannot be, isolated from its context in the abundant apocalyptic output of the period.

Apocalyptic was the last, and in some respects the highest form taken by the Jewish hope of a great Kingdom of God. In its earliest shape that hope was not only purely national, but materialistic, being little more than the expectation that God would raise up from the House of David a king who would rule justly and whose reign would bring unbounded prosperity to the people. Even so far back as Amos, his reference to the "Day of the Lord" proves that the idea that God by some mighty act would exalt and glorify Israel had long been familiar, though he gives the expectation a new turn by announcing that the Day would be a Day of Judgment not only for Israel's foes, but for Israel itself. In the course of its history this expectation in the minds of the prophets took various forms. Sometimes the coming kingdom was associated with a Messiah and sometimes not. Sometimes it narrowed to a mere vindication of the Jews, and sometimes it widened to a universal brotherhood among men, and endless peace on an earth from which every shadow of pain and trouble had been banished. But through their whole history, and especially after the return from exile, and whether the Hope took high forms or low, the Jews looked forward to a great Day of the Lord, a divine intervention, a time when God would vindicate their faith before the world and establish His own Kingdom in the earth.

But in the second century before Christ, when prolonged disappointment and heavy oppression had worn down the hopes of the people, apocalyptic, of which there had been some anticipations even in the older prophecy, suddenly sprang into vigorous life. The chief characteristic of the new

² Enoch lxii.; and compare *Testament of XII. Patriarchs*—"I was alone, and God comforted me: I was sick, and the Lord visited me: I was in prison, and my God showed favour unto me," etc., *Test. Jos.* i. 6.

apocalyptic is that it abandons once for all the old expectation of a Kingdom of God on this present earth.³ If these writers speak at all of an earthly kingdom it is as having only a temporary duration (three generations; 400; 1,000 years, etc.), and therefore not as being the kingdom of God which in their view is eternal. But this temporal kingdom is but a concession to the older tradition. The great and controlling conviction of the apocalyptists is that the material order is hastening to its dissolution, and that the world is so evil that nothing but immediate judgment awaits it. As the *Apocalypse of Baruch* expresses it—

For the youth of the world is past,
 And the strength of the creation is already exhausted,
 And the advent of the times is very short,
 Yea, they have passed by:
 And the pitcher is near to the cistern,
 And the ship to the port.

—LXXXV. 10.

There will be a fierce tribulation for the righteous for a little while, and then God will put forth His power suddenly, the heavens and the earth will pass away like smoke, and there will be a new and supernatural order in which the righteous in Israel will be immortal and blessed for ever. It will be a spiritual creation in which there are spiritual abodes for the approved of God, while the wicked remain in or are doomed to Sheol. Nothing that man can do will hasten the coming of this New Creation. Men can but wait, and by obedience to the Law of God prepare themselves for it. But that the time is short is the message of these writers from *Daniel* onwards. Some of them are intensely Jewish in their outlook, but others extend the mercies of the Age to Come to the worthy among the Gentiles. It is evident that such conceptions as these mark a significant advance on the older prophetic visions of the future.

Not all of these writers speak of a Messiah in connection with these hopes, for obvious reasons. Of those who do, some adhere to the old tradition of a Son of David, and some, under the influence of the Maccabean victories, declare he will be of the tribe of Levi. A late writer of this school says that he will reign in the temporal kingdom and will die at the end of it.⁴ But a bold and original thinker, one of the writers of the Book of Enoch, takes the "Son of Man" of Daniel, who in that book is not a person but a symbol of the righteous com-

³ Charles—*Eschatology, Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian*, p. 247ff.

⁴ 2 Esdras vii. 29.

munity, and speaks of him as the Messiah who waits in heaven for his manifestation at the approaching end of the world. He has been from the beginning with God. Says this writer, and the free use of figures is noteworthy and characteristic of apocalyptic—

“And in that place I saw the fountain of righteousness which was inexhaustible: and around it were many fountains of wisdom. And all the thirsty drank of them, and were filled with wisdom, and their dwellings were with the righteous and holy and elect. And at that hour that Son of Man was named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, and his name before the Head of Days. Yea, before the sun and the signs were created, before the stars of heaven were made, his name was named before the Lord of Spirits. He shall be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves and not fall, and he shall be the light of the Gentiles, and the hope of those who are troubled of heart. . . . And for this reason hath he been chosen and hidden before Him, before the creation of the world and for evermore.”⁵

It is this Son of Man who is to sit on the throne of his glory and judge the kings and the mighty and the exalted of the earth, and reward the righteous with “garments of glory.”

“The Lord of Spirits will abide over them, and with that Son of Man shall they eat and lie down and rise up for ever and ever.”

It is impossible to make a harmonious whole of all the varied anticipations and visions of these sometimes beautiful but, to us, always strange books; and it is impossible to say how far these ideas were general in the time of Christ. Probably the masses of the people still adhered to the national and earthly hope of deliverance from foreign oppression and supremacy over other nations. But the number of these books and fragments of them that have survived itself witnesses to their wide diffusion. There is no doubt of their popularity in many devout circles, and their great influence on the early church which preserved them. And there is equally no doubt that our Lord was familiar with the apocalyptic movement, and deliberately attached His message to this—the last form taken by the ancient expectation, as it voiced itself not in a book but in a man, John the Baptist.

Nor is it very difficult to see why He should do so, apart from His recognition of the divine calling of John.

1. In the first place, in this way, He associated His mission and work with the past. He set Himself in line with

⁵ Enoch xlvi. 1—6 (Charles).

the great process of revelation as the culmination and goal of it all. He announced by His very adoption of apocalyptic that He had not come to destroy but to fulfil. His point of attachment to the age-long hope of His people was in the apocalyptic in which that hope had already been transmuted into a higher expectation.

2. In the second place, as the interests of apocalyptic were spiritual and not material, its conception of the Kingdom of God as a heavenly order was infinitely nearer to His thought than the merely national kingdom of popular expectation. And it is well to realize that when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom He did not mean a new social adjustment and order to be brought about merely by human effort and policy, but a supernatural kingdom, the reign of God over a redeemed humanity.

3. In the third place, the Son of Man of *Daniel* as individualised by *Enoch* was nearer to His own consciousness of a unique relationship to the Father than the "Son of David" who was to restore the fortunes of Israel. There were no earthly and political associations round the conception of the "Son of Man," but there was the suggestion of divine origin and authority.

4. In the fourth place, apocalyptic contained the idea of crisis, and of the need of alertness in view of unforeseen movements of God. The watchword of apocalyptic was Be ready, with your loins girt! And the God of Jesus was dynamic and not static, not a God merely *in* the historic process, but *over* it, a God who did things by the exercise of His free power. Upon this, in its own way, apocalyptic laid immense emphasis.

5. And lastly, the ethic of apocalyptic, simply because it was based on the conviction of the transiency of earthly things, tended to, and at its best was, an absolute ethic. There are more anticipations of Christ's teaching, on mutual forgiveness, for example, in some of these writings than in the Old Testament.⁶ And this is natural. A true ethic must be transcendental. Its sanctions and inspirations cannot be in the world of sense and experience, but in the unseen. And apocalyptic, breaking away as it did from the world-order, found them there as did Christ Himself.

It is in our Lord's references to the future that we naturally look for and find His apocalyptic teaching, for it is with the future that apocalyptic is concerned. And it may be conveniently and briefly associated with three groups of sayings.

⁶ cp. Charles *Between the Old and New Testaments*, p. 153.

(a). There is first the discourse on Last Things recorded in Mark xiii. and parallels in Matthew and Luke. After referring, in answer to a question, to the destruction of the Temple, He passes on to warn His disciples of coming persecutions and against false Christs, and bids them hold themselves in readiness for the sudden coming of their Lord, which would take place in that generation, though the actual Day and Hour was unknown even to the Son Himself. In connection with this discourse it should be said that a great and increasing majority of scholars find in it a brief interpolated Jewish-Christian apocalypse consisting of (in Mark) vv. 7-8, 14-20, 24-26. These verses come away easily, not only without disturbing, but with gain to the context, leaving a straightforward, unconfusing, and characteristic utterance.

(b). In the second place there is a group of parables which emphasise the necessity of watchfulness in view of the sudden return of the Master or Bridegroom.

(c). And in the third place there are a number of sayings which raise the problem in an acute form. "When they persecute you in this city, flee into the next; for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come" (Matt. x. 23). "And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There be some here, of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix. 1). "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye shall also sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. xix. 28). Then there is His word to Caiaphas, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64); to which can be added His words to the disciples at the Last Supper, "I will not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the Kingdom of God shall come" (Luke xxii. 18). All these are apocalyptic sayings, and even when allowance is made for poetic form, as in the last quotation, and for a probably pregnant force in the "henceforth" of the declaration before Caiaphas, they do suggest that our Lord looked forward to a future and speedy coming of the Kingdom of God in true apocalyptic fashion, and that He connected this with His own more or less immediate return in glory. The end might come at any moment, but would certainly be within the lifetime of His disciples, or of some of them.

If stress is to be laid on the letter of these announcements and they are to be interpreted solely through the

current apocalyptic, then we are shut up to the conclusion that our Lord shared the mistaken hope of His time, for nothing of this kind took place. But even if it were so, such an acknowledgment would not affect our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the ground of our hope, and the object of our worship. We should see in it only part of the conditions of human limitation inseparable from a real Incarnation. Says Keim, "If it is possible for us to discover that the very idea of the impending decisive judgments of God, which took possession of His soul with fresh strength, steeled His human courage, and heightened His self-renouncing devotion, by instigating Him to save from Judgment whatever could by any means be saved, we gladly surrender our minds to the narrowed conception as the good will of God, who could only in such a way uphold the sinking human energies of His instrument, and secure the fruits of His campaign in violently shaken and vanquished human souls."⁷

And yet before we acquiesce in this explanation there are many weighty considerations to which justice must be done.

1. Our Lord's conception of God, except that it also was dynamic, was not the apocalyptic conception. There is scarcely anything in common between the absent God of the apocalyptists who will intervene only at the end of the world, and the very present God of Jesus who feeds the birds of the air, clothes the lilies of the field, and is the forgiving and loving Father of men. Jesus sees the earth of the present as the scene of divine and gracious activities, and the familiar petition, "Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," though it is apocalyptic in form is not one which any thorough-going apocalyptist could offer.

2. Though He adopted the Enochic title of "Son of Man," with its suggestion of supernatural origin and authority, a study of the many passages in which it occurs shows that He fused it with the Suffering Servant of II. Isaiah, which in effect transformed it out of all recognition.

3. The Kingdom of God, whatever He said of the future, was a present reality to Him. It had already come in His own consciousness of spiritual relationship to the Father, and the proof to others of the presence of the Kingdom in the midst of men was the mighty deeds of mercy that accompanied His ministry. The mere transference of the Kingdom from the future into the present was a revolution in apocalyptic, as great as was an earthly career for the "Son of Man."

4. There is His own hint of what He called the

⁷ *Jesus of Nazara*, vol. IV., p. 105 (Eng. Trans.).

"mystery of the kingdom," which of itself suggested that there was something original in His message and work; and the immense wealth and variety of His parabolic teaching is a comment on His words.

5. There is His habitual reserve on eschatological matters, His refusal, for example, to discuss the common apocalyptic problem as to the number of the saved.⁸ And there is His identification of John the Baptist with the expected Elijah, an identification which would have astonished that lonely prophet, but which does suggest the freedom with which our Lord could treat apocalyptic conceptions.

6. Our Lord's ethical teaching, though it is transcendental, is not apocalyptic. It is based not on the imminence of a supernatural invasion and the destruction of the world, but on men's present relations to God. It is because God is of the nature Jesus discloses that men are to be pure and meek and unselfish and forgiving. They are to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. Such an ethic is not hedonistic or utilitarian, and our Lord made no secret of the hardship and suffering it would involve in the present order. On the contrary He trod the path of suffering Himself, and called upon His followers to take up the Cross. It is only by such an ethic that the present world can be redeemed, and there is nothing transitory or provisional in its basis in the character of God.

7. And above all, as we have already seen, there was the genius of His ministry, His passion for souls, the special work of saving the lost which He declared was the work He came to do. His first miracle was connected by Himself with His power to forgive sins, and He went to His death as the Saviour of men. Nor can we imagine that His identification of Himself with the Suffering Servant was an afterthought. It was clearly to fulfil this vocation that He came forth from Galilee and began His ministry.

So we have these two things side by side in the words of Jesus, and it is possible that it is beyond our power to reconcile them. Dowden, in his classic book on Shakespeare, speaking of Hamlet, says, "It must not be supposed then that any *idea*, any magic phrase will solve the difficulties presented by the play, or suddenly illuminate everything in it which is obscure. The obscurity itself is a vital part of the work of art which deals not with a problem but with a life."⁹ A more recent writer, dealing with Robertson's solution of the difficulties of this play by a theory of unassimilated portions

⁸ cp. 2 *Esdras* viii. 3; *Ap. Bar.* xx. 11.

⁹ *Shakespeare—His Mind and Art*, p. 127.

of an older play, suggests more reasonably that the obscurity is due to the inferiority of our minds to Shakespeare's, in that he in his greatness was able to combine in inner harmony ideas and emotions which are beyond our power to reconcile. It need not surprise us, then, if in the consciousness of our Lord, and in a mind so vastly greater than any other that has appeared on earth, there should be perfect harmony between all these, to us, so different and discordant conceptions. Most certainly, there is nowhere any sign in Him of inward contradiction, of difficulty or confusion. It may be that it is the very greatness of Jesus that baffles us here as in so many ways.

And yet we are no more compelled to this conclusion than we are to the admission that our Lord was fundamentally mistaken. If we approach the problem by way of the actual sequel to our Lord's death and resurrection, we do have a measure of light. In the experience of the early church as that experience throbs in the New Testament we find that, in spite of the persistence of apocalyptic hopes, there is the joyous consciousness of a present and supernatural life in Christ, and of a Kingdom of God into which believers had already been introduced. "God has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love." And we are entitled to say with Moffatt, "If the primitive theology of the Church succeeded in penetrating to some consciousness of the present kingdom, it is an inversion of probabilities to deny that the mind of Jesus was unequal to such a range and depth of insight."¹⁰ But this is to suggest that our Lord may have anticipated something of what actually happened, and that this underlies His apocalyptic language. What He had to express, it must be remembered, was not the mere triumph of His cause, or of His ideas and influence, as though He were a rejected prophet sure of ultimate vindication, but the coming of a Kingdom of which He was the embodiment and Lord, and which was so identified with Himself and His redeeming work that it would ever depend on His presence and power. How except in symbols of some kind could that be expressed while it was yet in the future? The very use of symbols suggests, as does the Lord's Supper, a reality beyond the power of prose to describe. In other connections we have seen how our Lord transmuted apocalyptic conceptions, changing the lead to gold; can we not believe that His use of apocalyptic language was always to the same purpose? In the fourth gospel, as in great parts of the New Testament, apocalyptic is transcended, and the apocalyptic words of Jesus are translated

¹⁰ *Theology of the Gospels*, p. 83.

into the language of spiritual experience. The very phrase, "Kingdom of God" almost disappears, and "Eternal Life" takes its place, and the two instances in which it occurs are connected with the spiritual birth. The Judgment ceases to be spectacular and reserved unto the close of the world, it is a process proceeding during the earthly life of Jesus and continuing as the Holy Spirit convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. If there is one great Day of Judgment it is past, for it was the day when Christ judged and dethroned the Prince of this World on the Cross. "Now is the judgment of this world, now is the Prince of this world cast out." The hour in which the Son is glorified is the same hour in which He glorified the Father in triumph of obedience. And instead of an apocalyptic coming of Jesus with the clouds of heaven, we have in John His coming in the power of the Spirit to abide with and in His people. The second advent has taken place, and continues in increasing power, and the existence and experience of the church is the proof of it. Dare we say that the Evangelist has mistaken the mind of Jesus on all these matters, and has given us a Jesus greater because more spiritual than the Jesus of history? Is it not reasonable to hold that his is the true interpretation, and that our Lord did look forward to a spiritual event, even such a personal coming in the Spirit as actually came to pass? It was inevitable, under the conditions of His earthly life, that this glory and power of the future should be formulated and expressed in symbols, and these symbols lay to His hand. And the more we realize our Lord's greatness and His sovereign freedom in the use of apocalyptic language and ideas, the less shall we be disposed to believe that His horizon was really bounded by its form.

It is unnecessary to deal in any detail with the later apocalyptic of the New Testament. It was entirely natural that the primitive Jewish Church, inheriting the whole apocalyptic tradition of the age, should understand literally these utterances of Christ, and be dominated by the expectation of His visible return, either to restore the Kingdom of David or to fulfil the apocalyptic programme. The apostle Paul, in his early ministry appears to have been strongly apocalyptic, though the peculiarities of his expectation concerning the prior appearance of the "Man of Sin" derive not from Jesus but from the Pharisaic circles from whence he came. In his later ministry, however, his apocalyptic became blanched, even to vanishing away, as the Person of Christ grew upon him in its soteriological and cosmic significance. After his experiences at Ephesus, when he "despaired even of

life," and between the two epistles to the Corinthians, there is a marked change of tone and personal outlook. His hope had been to see Christ descending from heaven, now and henceforth it was that he should depart and be with the Lord. In the letter of Jude, "Enoch" is quoted as inspired scripture not only with reference to the apocalyptic coming of Christ, but to the fall of the angels. In the Book of Revelation, with its large quotations from Jewish apocalypses, we have a sudden and brilliant blazing of the apocalyptic faith, but in a comparatively brief time the Book became an enigma to a church that was moving rapidly away from these ideas. In the fourth gospel, as we have seen, they were spiritualised; and in the first Johannine epistle, though we still feel the vibrations of apocalyptic thought, even the Antichrist has become a symbol of false teachers. The Church had taken another and a higher road, though there have seldom been wanting, and more especially in times of crisis, some who have strayed into the thickets that cover the forsaken path.

It only remains to ask whether there is still any value in the apocalyptic which, as such, we have left behind. And surely there is.

In the first place, the Church cannot live without hope. It cannot, without falsity to its faith in Jesus, acquiesce in the present condition of the world. It is bound to believe in its redemption. And apocalyptic does fix our attention on the future, a future in which the divine purpose shall be fulfilled. There is the "one far off divine event to which the whole creation moves." If we say with Cairns, "The principle . . . that the true meaning of the Parousia discourses is the symbolical and poetic presentation of the future victory of Christ in His Kingdom," then we must go on to say with him, "This whole view of the future necessarily carries the disciple beyond religious individualism. It is a practical assertion that the entire domain of human life belongs to Christ, not only that inner world in which each disciple walks alone with his God, but also the great outward world of human society in all its varied forms."¹¹ It is, after all, a *Kingdom* that we have in view, and that kingdom the goal of all history. It is a wide and inspiring prospect that is spread before us, not the mere salvation of isolated souls, but the redemption of humanity. Apocalyptic bids us lift up our eyes to the future; and the Church perishes when it loses the vision.

In the second place, by its stress on the power of God, it is a permanent reminder of the futility of all efforts to save the world by mere human policies and arrangements. What

¹¹ *Christianity in the Modern World*, p. 208.

is often spoken of as the "Kingdom of God," the social betterment which is to be the issue of programmes and acts of Parliament and international understandings, is scarcely even a parody of the Kingdom of God according to the gospels. Such ends may be legitimate objects of Christian activities, and part of the duty we owe to God and man. But the service of the Kingdom is other than this. It involves the ethic of Jesus, the renunciation of the world for the sake of the world, the bearing of love's cross along the path He went, in the conviction that it is the pathway of the redeeming energies of God. For the Kingdom of God comes not with observation, but by the power of God working in and through human hearts consciously surrendered to Him. And it is ever coming, and never to be fully manifested in this world of time and space which has an end. It involves a redeemed humanity, and not merely a more happily situated humanity. And it was part of the message of Jesus that the power of God to accomplish wonders of redemption is at the service of His love, when men have faith enough to believe in it, and venture themselves for and upon Him. It is this value of apocalyptic that is rightly emphasised by Professor Hogg in his suggestive book, *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*.

And in the third place apocalyptic insists on the element of crisis and surprise in the life of the world and of the individual. It contradicts the fatal belief in inevitable and mechanical progress, which cuts the nerve of effort and deceives men to their undoing. Says Dr. Galloway in his book on *The Idea of Immortality*,¹² "The presence of sin in the world makes progress a hard and bitter conflict, and the good can only grow in the individual and society as the fruit of struggle and earnest endeavour. Life for man is a long series of tests. Hence human progress is not an inflexible movement in a pre-determined line, but a spiritual task, and so human experience is a discipline and an education." In its own way, and by its demand for watchfulness, apocalyptic stresses the same truth. It emphasises the incalculable element in history and life, and the necessity of the wakeful mind and readiness for the Great Hour. There are some to whom the concrete images of apocalyptic are still so helpful that their spiritual vigilance seems to them to depend upon belief in the very letter, just as there are some ancient souls to whom heaven itself is inconceivable apart from the golden pavement and the orient pearl. But we are not living in a two-storied universe; the heavens have become astronomical, and it is not possible for those who see apocalyptic in historical perspective and realize

¹² p. 226.

its origin, development, and final transmutation, to use it in this artless way. It is the more important that we should not miss its essential truth. We do live in a universe of immeasurable possibilities, and in a world in which the will of God and man are realities. In such a world the attitude of alertness, of watchfulness against sudden temptation, of readiness for unlooked-for tests, of promptness to seize the swift and precious opportunity, and of expectation of fresh movements of the Spirit of God, is the only reasonable attitude. In crises of the world and of life, in visions that come and go like lightning that shines from one end of heaven to the other, in unheralded events that swell with destiny, and in the day of death—the apocalypse of the soul, it is still true that the Son of Man cometh in an hour we know not, and blessed is he whom his Lord finds ready.

THE HEROIC AGE OF CONGREGATIONALISM. By
the Rev. B. Nightingale, M.A., Litt.D. 64 pages. Memorial
Hall, 1s. 3d. net.

A careful and well-informed historian can often sum up great periods well. Dr. Nightingale here tells briefly the home mission work of 1790-1825. The background is terrible; the county of Worcester, with 160,546 inhabitants, "has been termed the Garden of England, but in a moral light it may be regarded as a waste, howling wilderness": and detailed evidence is given as to Lancashire. It is shown that in one generation, twenty-two County Unions were formed, pastors were stirred to new efforts, and itinerant evangelists were employed. Very striking is the summary that while 295 Congregational churches date from 1662, and 243 were founded next century, no fewer than 577 arose in this Heroic Age. From the Baptist standpoint, we note that this was an echo of what had occurred among us. The Leicestershire movement started with 1745, pastors were widening out to the villages in a score of years, the B.M.S. of 1792 undertook Home Mission work within four years, while our Associations had been doing this work, albeit fitfully, right from their foundation in the seventeenth century. Our Heroic Age was that of Milton and Bunyan.