

The Approaching Advent of Christ

by
Alexander Reese

PREFACE

This volume is not intended to add to those crying, "Lo here," "Lo there," at every outbreak of war, of famine, and of pestilence in our distracted world. Nor does it aim at expounding the doctrine of the Second Advent according to its natural content and implications. It is simply an examination of prophetic theories that have gained a large acceptance among Evangelical Anglicans, Fundamentalists in all the Protestant Churches, Plymouth Brethren, Keswick, and similar movements, free-lance Bible teachers and evangelists, and all whose leanings are toward a realistic program of the End, and a belief, sometimes true, that Providence is with the small battalions and the Wee Frees.

These views, which began to be propagated a little over one hundred years ago in the separatist movements of Edward Irving and J. N. Darby, have spread to the remotest corners of the earth and enlisted supporters in most of the Reformed Churches in Christendom, including the Mission field. They are held and spread with conviction and tenacity, and occasionally with overbearing confidence. They have had the advantage of being outstanding tenets in all sections of a denomination which has had the satisfaction of seeing the peaceful penetration of other communions by their theories of the End.¹ So much so, that an increasing number of pastors feel called upon to leave the ordered work of the pastorate to stir up interest in what is called the "imminent" or impending Coming of Christ. Some of these, at a few hours notice, can fill the largest Churches with audiences anxious to hear of the latest signs of the times, though it is a fundamental presupposition of the school that the Imminent Advent awaits the fulfillment of no signs whatever. Some of this interest is wholesome; more of it would be if all of what is taught were true.

These prophetic theories have often been examined, but usually in tracts and booklets of an adventitious character, which have generally been ignored or not taken seriously. It has been like bowling to Bradman, or pitching to "Babe" Ruth, with a ping-pong ball and against the wind. The time seems to have come for a more congruous effort.

The reader's attention is drawn to one or two features of the work. First, written for people who are largely strangers to the great commentaries, it aims at illuminating the discussion of disputed texts by

1 This is furthered by the world-wide circulation of *The Scofield Reference Edition* of the Bible (over a million copies). There is much sound divinity, admirably collated, in it; but it is a pity that an alternative edition is not available with the text of *The 1911 Bible*, which was about the best of all attempts made to correct the Family Bible of the English-speaking world. It [*The Scofield Reference Edition*] was done by a company of American scholars and Dr. Scofield acted as secretary. It is a pity also that highly-debatable theories of the End were set down alongside the sacred text as if they were assured results of modern knowledge. More use might also have been made of the magnificent expository material in the works of great scholars like J. A. Alexander, Delitzsch, Skinner, and Sir. G. A. Smith.

drawing freely on those works. Writers of the prophetic future sometimes furthered the acceptance of their views by strong denunciations of commentaries, introductions, and "traditional exegesis." People's minds were thus prepared for accepting peculiar views. I think, on the contrary, that ministers and educated laymen ought to thank God devoutly for the Golden Age of exegesis that entered with the publication of Winer's Grammar of the Greek Testament in 1822, and continues in the issue of all kinds of learned helps to our own day. It is an extraordinary gain that commentators have abandoned denominational and party exegesis, and in dry light aim at telling us what the text is saying; not what it ought to say, on "the analogy of truth" and similar presuppositions, but what it says in the new light from all departments or research.

When, therefore, someone has a freak interpretation to commend to us, I have drawn on the great exegetes to give us their view of it, trusting that the average educated reader will see that a natural interpretation, backed by scholars of the highest standing, is preferable to a freak one backed by dogmatism and the requirements of a system.

These selections will indicate my debt to the writers mentioned. But I feel that no acknowledgment will reveal the debt I owe to the writings of Dr. Theodore Zahn. Dr. Stalker once said that Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* was a "gift from God" to the English people. And one reader of it has felt like that about Zahn's *Introduction to The New Testament* (E.T., 1909, 3 vols.), of which Dr. Jacobus of Hartford Seminary (U.S.A.), the able scholar to whose initiative and interest we owe this gift in an English dress, said that it is "an unexampled treasury." Of the criticism I am not competent to say anything; but any pastor with a taste for such things might say of one feature of the work, What could be more magnificent than the paraphrases and summaries of book after book of the N.T., beginning with "The Circumstances of the Readers" of the Epistle of James, and "The Personality of James," continuing through the earlier Epistle of Paul, reaching "The Contents, Plan, and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel" (a wonderful chapter), and concluding with eighty pages on the Apocalypse, that are worth their weight in gold for the appreciation and understanding of that difficult book.

This feature of Dr. Zahn's work evoked praise from Dr. E. Nestle as an aid to the textual criticism of the N.T. It merits the attention of very many pastors who have had their faith undermined by the too hasty acceptance of a criticism that makes [a] large part of the N.T. writings the work of "anonymous or fictitious authors" (Ramsay), and this without their even knowing the great strength of the case for the N.T. of tradition. It was Dr. P. T. Forsyth who wrote a generation ago, that "certain nimble popular journals live on the delusion" that all the ability and knowledge are on the critical side. "They have not so much as heard whether there be alongside of brilliants like Wernle or Schmiedel, giants like Kähler or Zahn. It would not be too much to say that the latter two are among the most powerful minds of the world in the region--one of theology, and one of scholarship. Yet in this country, and certainly to our preachers, they are almost unknown" (*Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, preface).

I should add that in learned quotations I have often given the English for the Greek and Hebrew in Scripture quotations. Sometimes I have translated Latin quotations. It should be said also that, unless otherwise stated, italics are by the present writer, though there may be a slip or two here owing to the circumstances in which the quotations have been checked. It may be remarked that Meyer used italics a great deal; so did A. T. Robertson, though in his case it was a typographical device.

If any reader thinks that I have dealt with the subject in too great detail, I may as well confess that my own view is decidedly the same. It would be fortunate if Christians could reach agreement on a few

leading aspects of the Second Coming instead of stirring up disunity by prophetic speculation on many others that call for patience and tolerance. Nevertheless, I must decline to make any change in the form of presentation. The only possible hope of reaching a decision in the debate is by paying Darbyists² the compliment of answering with thoroughness all their principal arguments. Their long reign has been due to the fact that no one has ever attempted this before.

For another feature of my book, I feel almost like apologizing to any scholarly reader who picks up this volume. Provost Salmon said once that "it is always irksome to be offered proof of something that it has never occurred to you to doubt." I have to confess that all through I have been conscious of that accusing statement. I frequently labor to prove things--like the promise of immortality in Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 26:19--that few or no cultivated readers ever doubted. My only plea is an anticipation that for a handful of readers who never doubted such things, my book will have hundreds who do. This [is] because of a whole system of interpretation that they have accepted, and that has never been properly examined. Here again I have had to decline to make any alteration in my approach to the subject, though I realize that some few readers may have cause of complaint.

I have drawn freely on modern revisions of the N.T., from Darby to Dr. G. W. Wade. This is done simply because they frequently light up texts that have been misunderstood, often from their very familiarity. Friends have warned me that this feature will not go down with some of my readers. They are prejudiced against Dr. Moffatt because of his critical position on the N.T. He is called a "Modernist," and so on. Dr. Moffatt, I judge, would prefer to be called a "Liberal," which is usually applied to one who, like him, accepts the critical view of the Bible together with the central truths of the Incarnation and Resurrection of our Lord. I think it sufficient to say that I am not a Modernist, and critics should limit themselves to seizing on any rationalism that I may introduce from any source whatever. My belief is that a student who had not learned the value of Dr. Moffatt's translation for unraveling the difficulties of an epistle like 2 Corinthians, or Galatians, or Hebrews, is shutting his eyes to the light and losing much.

I have refrained from giving a bibliography. A long list of learned works is apt to convey the impression that the author is a scholar or a theologian. As I am neither, I have omitted it. A few works will be found mentioned under a column of abbreviations. This was drawn up only to permit the use of shortened titles in the text.

On a matter that may provoke criticism--the controversial spirit of the book--I may refer the reader to the paragraph from Dr. Stalker, a revered teacher of the whole Church, on the title-sheet of this volume. I may say also that I agree with Dr. H. L. Goudge in his excellent *British-Israel Theory*, that a writer is not always under obligation to suppress his amusement at his opponent's arguments. And the author of 1 Corinthians 13 did not feel that he was called upon to suppress all his irony and indignation when dealing with grave matters in 2 Corinthians and Galatians.

In the present volume, one with no such position as those of the writers just mentioned, is seeking to save large tracts of the N.T. from extremely harmful principles of interpretation very widely held--and increasingly held. There is a medium, surely, between the crudities of controversy in Milton's time and a meekness that, up till now, has only given the impression of a case so weak that it cannot command vigor and can safely be ignored.

2 See ADDITIONAL NOTE at end of Preface.

Hazlitt is reported to have indicated "animated moderation" as the ideal in controversy. I hope that the controversial method in the present volume is not far removed from that.

Perhaps I may add, to explain references in the text, that a second volume, all of which (except a few pages) was written in the first months of the World War, is about ready. It aims at examining thoroughly the pre-trib interpretation of Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25, and deals with the prophetic and dispensational theories of Sir R. Anderson, E. W. Bullinger, J. N. Darby, A. C. Gaebelein, W. Kelly, D. M. Panton, and C. I. Scofield.*

It remains to express my deep obligations to three or four friends whose help has lightened greatly the work of preparing this volume for the publisher. The late Miss Maude Herriott, M.A., (formerly of the Department of Biology at Canterbury University College, Christchurch, New Zealand), rendered extremely valuable help of every kind when the MS. was first prepared in 1914. Only after this preface was drafted did the news come that this gifted and cultured woman, so fully representative of all that is best in Brethren saintliness, had passed to her rest in the Lord.

Criticisms by the Rev. G. H. Jupp (a life-long friend and editor of "The Outlook," the official organ of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand) were serviceable in ridding the 1914 MS. of many defects.

The Rev. Harold H. Cook of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, did cheerfully a lot of work that would have been a burden to the writer. He also made a special trip to England and N. America to arrange publication, correct the proof-sheets, and prepare the indexes.

My thanks are due also to my friend Mr. K. Howell Fountain of Christchurch, New Zealand, without whose counsel, energy, and enthusiasm the volume would never have got into print. He has maintained interest in the venture for over twenty years.

I cannot thank these four friends sufficiently for all the time and attention that they have bestowed on my work.

It should be added that, while the counsel and criticism of these friends have improved the book, they are not to be held responsible for defects that remain. Nor is it to be understood that they endorse all the views put forward, or presupposed in the writing of it.

On a particular point in Appendix I, I am indebted for suggestions to Mr. Andrew R. Kirk, of Christchurch, New Zealand, and to my brother, Mr. Daniel Reese, of the same city.

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American Prebyterian Mission,
Itabuna, Estado da Bahia,
Brazil
19th March 1937

* We have not been able to find this book or find it referenced in any article or book. Reese may never have finished it or published it.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Throughout the book I have used the term "Darbyist" and Mr. W. B. Neatby's term "Brethrensim." Without some such terms one can make no progress, unless one used intolerable circumlocutions. I may say that, although the term appeared in print some years ago, it was coined by me in 1914 so as to avoid "Darbyite," which had offensive associations. I hope this will be sufficient to persuade Brethren that the new term is not used churlishly. People are not offended at being called Calvinists or Arminians, and people, in or out of the Churches, who accept J. N. Darby's ideas on the Second Advent should not take it amiss if they are called "Darbyists." This word, I may explain, is the anglicised form of the Portuguese "Darbyistas."