

**THE SECOND ADVENT
OF THE LORD JESUS
CHRIST; A PAST EVENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649746590

The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ; A Past Event by Robert Townley

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ROBERT TOWNLEY

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THE

WITHDRAWN

SECOND ADVENT

OF

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

A PAST EVENT.

Τί ἐστιν ἀληθὲς.

PILATE.

BY

ROBERT TOWNLEY, A. B.,

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LONDON:

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, AND COMPANY.

D. MARPLES, LIVERPOOL.

1845.

PREFACE.

WHEN I commenced writing, it was merely with a view to publishing my reasons for quitting the communion of the Church of England. Having enlarged upon my original intention, I find it necessary to affix to this work a few prefatory observations.

The substance of the work was delivered in a course of lectures to the congregation which lately assembled at St. Matthew's, in this town. This will account for the matter of the few opening pages, which, had I known how far I should have been obliged to exceed my prescribed limits, would have formed of themselves the preface, instead of having a preface written in explanation.

The volume is sent forth into the world as a trifling contribution towards establishing what is much needed—a sound principle of Scripture interpretation. The truth of every statement propounded is by no means contended for. I prefer no claim similar to that of Swedenborg, Irving, and, in fact, all theologians who maintain that the present is a dispensation of the Holy Ghost. I claim not to have received any doctrine through an immediate and miraculous revelation. So far from asserting any thing of the kind, one position strongly taken up by me is, that Scripture is its own interpreter, and that what I have written is only so far valuable as that, in 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual,' I have brought various portions of the word of God to harmonize, and have shown that the Scriptures are not contradictory, wherever I have had occasion to examine them. It is probable, and more than probable, that some errors in reasoning, and some defects of exposition, may be detected. In the minor details, there may be mistakes; but while making these admissions, I contend most strenuously that there is not a shadow of a shade of error in the conclusion at which I have arrived. I assert in the most positive and distinct manner possible, that the doctrine of a past second advent is proved to a demonstration, and is unassailable. The belief of this doctrine has seriously affected my temporal wellbeing; though I am quite sensible that this is no evidence of its truth, and no excuse for its advocacy if it be untrue. The defence

of the doctrine has caused me to feel most acutely how much better I would have consulted my worldly prospects, if I could have stifled my convictions, and sailed along with the stream as others have done. The mere rumour of my religious belief has exposed me to the imputation of all the vile names which the vocabulary of a spurious Christianity can furnish forth. But even if it have been said of me, 'he hath spoken blasphemy,' it is nothing more than the repetition of an old charge: and following the example of my Divine Master, I would desire to make no complaint. Appealing to the same testimony as that to which Christ himself and his Apostles appealed, I would ask, Is the charge substantiated by proof, and by facts? I am most anxious to bring an opponent to the book; and having this leading object, among others, in view, I have prevailed upon myself to hazard a public, and, under existing circumstances, perhaps an apparently egotistical statement of my belief. I know not, nay, I am doubtful, whether I shall be any gainer by so doing. I do know, from a somewhat intimate acquaintance with the religion of human nature, and from the history of religious opinion, that my defence will be condemned in the mass, by many who will be so much offended at the conclusion expressed in the title page, that they will never think of putting themselves in possession of the premises. I do fear that prejudice—the prejudice of creeds and catechisms—will in most quarters operate so powerfully, that there may be few readers who will follow the example of the noble Bereans, and search the Scriptures whether these things are so. Most earnestly would I deprecate a hasty condemnation, or even any judgment of the work which is not founded upon a careful, and, as far as possible, an unbiassed perusal. After what I have stated, and with the solemn conviction on my mind *that I am in the right*, I feel that I have license to make this appeal, and that I shall not be considered transgressing if I enter my protest against the insane verdict of prejudice and pre-conception. I feel, moreover, that if I can secure the calm attention of enlightened minds, they will rise from the perusal of this work with the conviction, that the head and front of my offending is not that I have undermined any truth of Christianity, but that I have endeavoured to set forth a full and complete statement of its one cardinal and central doctrine—the atonement of the Son of God.

But it is time to enquire, To whom do I thus address myself, in the language of earnest expostulation? I answer, To the people, to the laity; to the hearers, not to the preachers; not to the teachers, but to the taught. I appeal to the pews: I make no appeal of any kind to the pulpits, except by way of a challenge to come forward in defence of their order. I know that all expostulation with the 'ministry' is lost

labour—a sound, and nothing more. Charges which never can, and never will be substantiated, will by the priesthood be repeated to those (and, alas, their name is Legion!) who are weak enough and deluded enough to believe them. They will be so repeated, simply because I have endeavoured to carry out the doctrine of the past second advent in all its important bearings, keeping in mind the Divine law, “what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” This doctrine is examined in the following pages in *its consequences*, and not merely as an isolated article of a religious belief, which can make no change in the relationship of man to God, whether it be fulfilled or no. The *consequences* of the past second advent are *fearful* to the priesthood; and when I say priesthood, I include, of course, the ministers of all sects, from Romanism to Mormonism, *presbyter being no other than priest* WRIT LARGE. The priesthood will be alive to this; they will see at a glance, that if the doctrine which I advocate be true, their occupation as a priesthood is gone, the source from which they get their gain being cut off. Hence the unmitigated condemnation of this view of Divine revelation: a condemnation which could force a priest of the Church of England to say, “Go to any dissenting chapel, rather than to St. Matthew’s,” and which can now draw from a priest of any dissenting body, “Go to any church—to a Roman chapel—but don’t go near Mr. Townley.” If these things were “done in a corner;” if this was the line of conduct pursued when I was merely an obscure individual, addressing a despised handful, who were likeminded with myself, what, it may be asked, will be done to this obscure individual, who has been presumptuous enough to commit himself and his opinions to the press?

In order, if possible, to save trouble, I will mention a few things which will *not* serve the purpose of the priesthood.

It will be of no avail to follow the example of Exeter Hall, and to try to put me and my book down by the use of opprobrious names. Hard words break no bones. Raillery is not *necessarily* reason; neither does it follow that invective is *always* argument. Neither, again, will it be of any avail to endeavour to substantiate a wholesale condemnation by the *ipse dixit* of any man, or of any body of men. I take my stand as a Protestant, on the right of private judgment. I acknowledge only one rule of faith, the Holy Scriptures, and reject all Mass-books, Prayer-books, Assembly’s Catechisms, and such like, as expositors of that rule. Neither, I would observe, will it answer the ends of religious systems, to meet the arguments of this work by that convenient resource of ignorance—the contemptuous pleasantry which affects to despise what it secretly fears. This volume makes pretensions of no ordinary kind, and must be met, if it be opposed at all, in no ordinary way. To say that

I am beneath notice—only worthy of silent contempt—or that I am mad and deluded, upon religious subjects, may impose upon fools and fanatics, but upon an independent, thinking individual, never. On the contrary, this course of procedure will be, to the reflecting mind, the strongest of all possible evidences that the work is unanswerable, and the doctrine not to be overthrown.

But why do I thus trouble myself, by anticipating a reply which may never be forthcoming, through sheer inability on the part of those who are called upon to render a "reason of the hope" that is in them? If we confine our observation to the priesthood of the Church of England, to whom shall we look for a Scriptural refutation of the proved statements of this work, viz., that the Bible promises no future coming of Christ, and, consequently, no resurrection of the body, nor any end of the world, neither a day of judgment? These positions *may* be taken up by an avowed infidel, and urged by him against *the* Christianity of the day. Nay, it may be, as it has been contended, that I am little better than an infidel in advocating them. Be it so. I repeat, to whom, and to which of the clergy shall we look for an exposure of their fallacy, if they be fallacies? So far as I am acquainted with the Establishment, with its theology and theologians, the search will be in vain. It is admitted even by the heads of the Church themselves, that there is nothing less taught in the Universities than divinity. The Bishop of St. David's, not long ago, in his place in Parliament, made this humiliating confession; and the reason is obvious. Of what use, it may be asked, is it to attempt an investigation of the Scriptures, when human creeds, and standards of centuries gone by, are opposed as a barrier to all investigation? These devices of man's contrivance are the great hindrance to the spread of Biblical knowledge; and, without a doubt, Christianity would be an immense gainer if they were one and all swept away into the oblivion of the dark and superstitious ages from which they emanated. The knowledge of the volume of nature every one allows to be progressive. The hidden mysteries of God's beautiful and natural creation, are one by one, brought out to the astonished gaze of his intelligent creatures. We hear on every side propositions such as the following:—What would our forefathers think, if they were to come among the men of this generation, and see the wonderful progress which hath been made by a world around us? Who can doubt, asks another, that the most advanced outposts of the territory conquered by the science of this age, will have dwindled and become scarcely perceptible to the retroverted eye of the philosopher of 1946? How many great questions in physical science, and in ethics, will then have been solved; and to how many of the distresses of the sons of men

will remedies have then been applied? Alas! reflects a third party, alas! how sweetly will the wheels of the social machine, as well as the current of individual life, then move; and why, O why, have we been condemned to live in the early part of this darkling century, streaked but with the dawnings of so much glory! How glorious the prospect for those who shall be born to our children's children!—What have we in any measure corresponding with this, asked of that book, which I believe to be the perfection of science—the emanation of the mind of Deity? What are the facts? For centuries of blinded ignorance, the Church of Rome has said, “Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.” For nearly 300 years, the Church of England, in close imitation of her mother, has, by reason of her creeds, shut the volume of inspiration to her members. The knowledge of the language in which the Scriptures were written is ever progressing. Men the most learned have given us improved versions of one book of the Bible after another, without, however, venturing to impugn the veracity of a single orthodox article of a human creed. Grammarians, lexicographers, and critics, are putting into our hands the key to unlock the treasures of Oriental philology; and it is every day more and more obvious, says a learned writer, that philology is giving laws to theology. Obscure places of Scripture are becoming plain, rough places smooth, and crooked things straight. The Inquisition absurdity, which condemned Galileo, is now the subject of ridicule, the Romanist himself being judge. A better acquaintance with the original Hebrew has shown that it was the *sunshine*, and not the *sun*, which Joshua commanded to stand still, and that therefore the Bible and the philosopher are both agreed that the sun is fixed in the centre of our system, while the earth and the other planets move round it: the motion of the earth being arrested by the word of Joshua, and consequently the *apparent* motion of the sun. But of what avail is all this? Our Churches put a veto upon all search which would venture to arraign the *infallibility* of their creeds and confessions. The Church of England cannot be prevailed upon even to amend her Prayer-book. She declares that if a man do not believe every tittle of her Athanasian Creed, *without doubt he shall perish everlastingly!* The attempt to alter *this* has been made, time after time, by her own clergy, and all to no purpose. Much less is it to be expected that she will ever issue another and a better version of the Scriptures, or that the state will take upon itself to do this necessary work, so long as connected with the Church. The revision might be left with her own University Professors: nay, with one of them, the present Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge. *We* would humbly beg and pray for *two slight alterations only*: for the erasure of the traditionary date fixed to the Revela-

tion of John, and for a scholarlike rendering of the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." The entreaty would be in vain; for the Hierarchy, from the Archbishop to the working Curate, would easily divine that even an alteration so trifling might prove the ultimate downfall of the Establishment. The most learned of all her learned men, who have commented upon the Bible, dare not carry out their researches to their full extent—an extent which themselves must secretly have been convinced is just and true, viz., a declaration that the foundation of their Church is visionary—that its fundamental position, the doctrine of Apostolic succession, is a fallacy. But it is to be hoped something effective may, even in existing circumstances, be accomplished. I trust to see the day when one of the Gospels shall be printed and circulated, as faithfully rendered from the original, without the glosses of priestcraft, and the false coloring of preconceived notions, and natural religion, which now to a great extent make void the word of God in the apprehension of the unsuspecting English reader. I know no dearer desire than to see the Gospel by Matthew published, with a commentary advocating the views propounded in this work; and should be most willing to give every assistance in my power to any who had means and ability to undertake a labour of such momentous importance. The commentary would live and be valued when hundreds of the books which are now so popular would be known and remembered no more. All that has been hitherto written and spoken upon the doctrine of the past second advent, would sink into absolute insignificance before an undertaking like this. In the meanwhile, sanguine in a cause which I believe has Omnipotence for its patron, and believing that the past second advent will be recognised in the land, and by the people, as universally as is now the past first advent, I rest assured that sooner or later such a work will appear; and, as before hinted, when it does appear, it will be "a heavy blow and great discouragement" to a religious system which already shows evident symptoms of an approaching doom. The signs of the times seem to the watchful observer to point ultimately towards an enquiry, deep and searching, into that Book from whence all our Churches profess to derive their existence and authority. The Churches themselves are helping on to this conclusion, as they are now confessedly the great disturbers of the national peace, and the chief obstacle in the way of the Government of the country: yea, so much so, that, by their incessant agitation, they have forced the Ministry (doubtless much against its will) to propose an educational scheme for Ireland, wherein there is no religious provision whatever. If the nation is to be thus everlastingly embroiled—if the people are to be thus kept in a continual turmoil—they will begin surely to enquire more narrowly