

Thy Kingdom Come by W. Wybergh

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THERE are, I suppose, at the present time, few Theosophists whose thoughts are not to a large extent permeated and even dominated by the ever-present idea of the Coming of a World-Saviour. Whether we believe in it or not, however closely our attention may have to be concentrated upon this or that pressing need, there in the background is this all-absorbing topic.

It seems almost as though the hopes and interests of some centre round the question of the personality of the expected One, and their own possible relationship to Him, more than upon the character of the work that He is coming to do, and the effect that it is likely to have upon human society in general. No doubt these are they whose temperament leads them to throw themselves into a cause, not because they have made it their own but because some one greatly loved or admired has done so. For such temperaments it is quite natural to be absorbed in speculations as to the date and circumstances of His Coming, and to seize eagerly upon any available information or hints as to the egos that may have been associated with Him in past lives, hoping to find their own among the number, and trying to make sure of a continuance of the association in the future. This is a most natural desire for all men, but to people of this temperament it is of vital importance, for, since they judge the cause by the man who espouses it, if they make a mistake about the man they have nothing else to guide them. Apart from this, however, many people have a sound instinct that they themselves can do their best work only when inspired by personal devotion for a leader.

There are others who, while looking for the advent of a World-Teacher, are less concerned with His personality because, owing to temperament or experience, they are more easily inspired by an ideal than by a person. Such people, being themselves often enthusiastic for some particular ideal or cause, be it social or political reform, education, art, or religion, have the natural hope that the Teacher, when He comes, will give support to their own particular ideal, which of course *to them* seems the best possible. They can in fact, hardly conceive that He would countenance or support the principles to which they are opposed, forgetting that to others these principles may represent all that is most sacred and inspiring.

Now it is by almost all taken for granted that the great Spiritual Being to whose Coming they look forward will embody Himself in one single human personality, one single physical body and no more, and that He will thus lead a life on earth comparable to that of ordinary human beings. The assumption is that this physical presence in one such physical body is the essence of the whole "Coming," and that the test of discipleship and devotion to Him will be recognition of Him in that body, acceptance of what He may teach and obedience to what He may command.

It follows naturally from this idea that the thing which at the moment will appear of paramount importance must be to spread the good news of His Coming, and by propaganda, by organisation, by every possible

form of publicity, to create a large body of believers throughout the world. The existence, people think, of such a body of professed believers will ensure Him a good reception and facilitate His work whatever it may be. Without such an assumption as to the manner of His incarnation the possibility of an effective propaganda among the general public (and most of the Theosophical public as well) would, it must be admitted, be greatly reduced. We may perhaps reasonably maintain that we have got beyond the point of looking for a Teacher or Saviour who shall be political and national and nothing more. We no longer, like the Jews of old, look for a Messiah. Nevertheless to most people a Teacher means a person and nothing else, a visible, tangible, individual human being.

But surely it would be wise to recognise that after all it *is* an assumption that we are making, and only one among many possibilities. Of its obvious attractiveness it is hardly necessary to speak. For my own part I feel intensely the glamour of the idea. After a lifetime of struggling and questioning by the flickering light of one's own dim powers of discrimination and intuition, after so many mistakes and failures and disappointments, what a glorious relief not to have to think for oneself — to find on earth in human form a Leader whom one could follow with unquestioning devotion! And yet, though I look earnestly for the coming of a World-Teacher, I cannot honestly say that I am able to take this general and apparently simple and straightforward idea for granted. Equally unable and unwilling do I feel to dogmatise myself. I have a tense expectation, but I try to keep an open mind.

Of course I know well that pretty definite statements on the subject have been made by Mrs Besant and others in whom we have the greatest confidence, on the authority of their own inner vision, and there is a certain type of Theosophist who says at once: "That settles the question. Surely you would not back your opinion against hers!" But this, I feel, is a false issue. No one has insisted more strongly than Mrs Besant herself upon the fact that all such observations are liable to error, and are not to be regarded as authoritative for anyone but the seer. I cannot but believe that in this, as in all her statements, she means exactly what she says, for that absolutely candid and considerate attitude of hers is precisely what gives us such confidence in her. Why do not these good people take her at her word? I regard it as a sacred duty to try and think things out for ourselves, however much one would rather accept the opinion of another. I do not by any means intend to imply that one should use only his concrete, material intellect for this purpose. But I have been taught that by concentration and meditation on a subject one should try to bring his own intuition to bear upon it, and that as good an understanding, or better, may follow as that which can be obtained by the exercise of clairvoyant faculties. To do otherwise, to take another person's vision in place of one's own, is, I believe, deliberately to stifle the growth of intuition and spiritual insight. I would not therefore urge anyone to adopt my ideas in place of Mrs Besant's, but rather to think the thing out for himself. It is possible that all three may be right — or wrong!

People are apt to think that an event is a simple sort of thing: either it is so or it isn't so, either it takes place or it doesn't. But every event exists on many planes at once. It has its spiritual and its psychic, no less than its physical aspect, though what exactly these are is terribly hard to formulate or to express. The spiritual is the real, the important, the eternally true, the thing about which alone certainty exists or can exist. The physical is uncertain, multiple in its manifestation, subject to all sorts of modification by other physical events and circumstances. The psychic is uncertain and many-sided also, because it is always modified by the faculties and temperament of the seer. But certainty on the spiritual plane does not surely imply any certainty or authority for the mental or physical image in which by necessity the Spiritual is made manifest.

The Second Coming as a spiritual fact of universal significance is something about which, by the exercise of one's own spiritual faculties, it is possible to reach absolute conviction. As a physical fact, taking place this year or next year, in England or India or America, it is a matter to be judged of by the intellect, aided no doubt by whatever "psychic powers" you may happen to possess, that is to say your powers of forming pictures to express on the mental or astral planes your own intuitions of spiritual truth, or of seeing such pictures (thought-forms) fashioned by others for your instruction. You have in fact to formulate and estimate the probabilities from the facts at your disposal. Unless you know *all* the facts — and none but the Divine Consciousness itself can know them — there is no such thing as certainty, and, since the physical fact is, so to speak, but the shadow of the shadow of Reality, it doesn't really matter so much after all.

The "end of the world" and the Coming of a World-Teacher are coupled together in the imagination of mankind. On the face of it the connection is an arbitrary one; intellectually they may be regarded as two distinct events; yet I believe that spiritually they are inseparable, and perhaps even nothing but two aspects of the same event.

Judging intellectually, as a student of history, politics, economics, and social science might do, I think it is sufficiently apparent that we have indeed reached the "end of the age". For many years Socialists, a real voice crying in the wilderness, have pointed out how inevitably the present social order was ensuring its own destruction. Like everything else based upon the ruthless competition engendered by the sense of separateness, its very essence is disruptive and self-destructive: it is a question, not of "whether" but only of "when," and this independently of any prejudice about what will or ought to take its place. Socialists have given good reasons for thinking that the end was near, but they have gone further than merely to prophecy destruction. With all their incomplete premises, their ignoring of essential facts, their often faulty methods, their reliance upon mechanism and their sectional sympathies, they have, in promulgating the ideal of Universal Brotherhood, pierced right through to an eternal spiritual verity, and struck the key-note of a new age which corresponds in essentials with the Theosophical conceptions of "sixth-race" attributes, and with the Christian ideal of the Kingdom of God upon earth. In so doing they have indeed "made straight the way of the Lord". But besides the Socialists there has also existed for many years past an undefined, uneasy, illogical feeling of expectation among large sections of humanity, from the stupid, well-meaning pacifist to the bloodthirsty follower of the Mahdi, who can little or no reason for their belief. It may be said that such a feeling proves nothing, and this is quite true, but the point is that the prevalence of such a state of mind makes a change possible and may be even a considerable factor in bringing it about.

Anyone who has passed many years in close contact with all sorts of movements for political, social, or religious reform, and has shared in the enthusiastic hopes and inevitable disillusionment and renewed effort of which they are constituted, will certainly have been brought to realise, first, that no advance can be made so long as people are contented with things as they are, and secondly, that the best constructive efforts will fail unless the ideas formulated by the leaders are such as the public can make their own when put before them. The real advance is only possible when it seems so much a matter of course to the man in the street that he is firmly persuaded that the new idea originated with himself! The keenest intellect and most enlightened patriotism may desire the most beneficent measures, may even get them embodied in legislation, but until the people are ready they will be evaded and remain a dead letter, or else be distorted and misapplied, so as to do more harm than good. It is not the leaders who set the pace, but the stupidest of their followers. So also with religion. We have had the sublime teaching

and example of Jesus and of Buddha before us for two thousand years, but in all that time how many Christians and Buddhists have put this teaching into practice? It has been evaded, distorted, and misunderstood almost universally. The vague unrest among the ignorant, and their readiness to absorb new impressions is thus a far more significant thing than the rapidly changing outlook of the leaders of thought which is so apparent to all. There is indeed no lack of evidence, which the student can marshal for himself, and of which a most convincing and attractive presentation has been given us by Mrs Besant in her book *The Changing World*, that we have reached a great turning-point in the world's history. And now the Great War is bringing the fact home to millions who could not otherwise have realised it.

It may be said, then, without much fear of contradiction, that the "end of the world" *has* come — the world as we have known it, the old social order, the old tacit acceptance of brute force, of competition, of self-interest and materialism as the dominating factors of human life. But from the point of view of the ordinary or even of the Theosophical student, it cannot, as it seems to me, be said that this change is necessarily or inevitably bound up with the advent of a World-Teacher as popularly conceived: there is nothing, certainly, which demands His embodiment in a single personality, except the *a priori* assumption that there are no other possibilities. It may of course very reasonably be said that the signs of the times point to conditions similar to those under which a World-Teacher appeared once before. But this only implies the *possibility* of such an appearance now, not the necessity of it. I would not, myself, for a moment question this possibility, nor am I in a position in any way to criticise the statements that have been made on occult authority regarding His identity or previous appearances. But I do not see that any cogent argument has been brought forward to show that any Teacher is due to appear in this or that particular body, or *any* particular body, at this particular time or *any* particular time.

Indeed, I think there are some things that point to the unlikelihood of such an appearance at present. It seems to me not without significance that whereas the ideals of the old order, as embodied in the German conception of *Welt-macht*, involve a formal and exterior unity, *i.e.*, uniformity and centralisation, the new ideals contemplate a real or interior unity but an external diversity, a decentralisation and a dispersal and universalising of power and authority. It would seem that in the new order there is to be no leader among the nations, but that the least is to be as the greatest. Again in the British family of nations, as General Smuts has recently pointed out, "Imperialism" is dead and has been succeeded by a sort of composite entity. Similarly it is a very striking fact that while the forces of the old order are, as it were, summed up and typified by the *personal* leadership of a Kaiser or a Hindenburg, the new spirit has not hitherto brought to the front any one leader of outstanding merit or authority. The war is, on our side, a "peoples' war," as President Wilson has declared, and the spirit of it is exemplified, not in some phrase like "For King and Country" or "*Deutschland über alles*," but in the popular idea of "doing one's bit". The inspiration, that is, comes from within, not from without, and not from any leader; and this is not an accident but rather the typical spirit of the new order. Does not this feeling of co-operation, of being "members of one body," sound the note of Buddhi, the central motive of the future sixth race, in contrast with that of personality, Manas, the fifth-race motive of the past? And is it not in harmony with the essence of the Christ-idea? It has been well said that "Heaven cannot fully manifest its will to humanity through the individual, but must utter itself through multitudes". [*The National Being*, A.E.] I do not see how the personal leadership of a World-Teacher, as popularly conceived, fits in with this spirit.

Moreover, one may be permitted to say, in all humility, that such a "Coming" does not seem best calculated to help the world as it exists today. There is, I hope, no presumption in trying to think out what, under modern conditions, would be the most effective and therefore the most probable way in which an

exalted spiritual Being might manifest Himself upon earth. In doing so one must try to visualise the actual details, the everyday aspects, the practical difficulties; one must think in terms of newspapers, and excursion trains, and public lectures and discussions. We are too apt to slur over the details and to visualise a romantic and arresting figure in flowing, oriental robes, giving out wonderful new teachings, vouched for by the leaders of the Theosophical Society, who would probably carry world-wide conviction, but whom we at any rate would have no difficulty in recognising, whatever other people might do. Yet the chances are that this is very wide of the mark.

Let us think a moment. If the World-Teacher comes in a single personality, He will have to belong to some nationality. What if he were a German? Or if He were a Negro, or even a Hindû or a Chinaman, what a load of prejudice would have to be encountered and overcome among the nations of the West! If, on the other hand, He were an Englishman, or even if once again He were a Jew, what sort of a reception would He have among the nations of central and eastern Europe? There is no need to elaborate the point. Again He would belong to some one religion or to none (if He belonged to all He would be regarded as belonging to none); yet this would lay Him open to fatal misunderstanding and jealousy. There are some who think that, as a World-Teacher, He would found a new religion. To do so is to incur the hostility of all the old ones. And then think of the burning questions of politics, economics and social reform with which He would have to deal, and the bitter passions that would be aroused by anyone claiming to speak with Divine authority on such subjects. Remember also that His followers would in the nature of the case be compelled by their own theory and belief to accept every utterance of His on every subject as practically infallible and to proclaim it as such before the world. Think again of the newspapers, with their sensationalism, their superficiality, and their conscious or unconscious bias, and remember that they are the only means by which a Teacher in human form can become known to the masses. And this brings me to one of the fundamental difficulties. Assuming, according to this theory, that the World-Teacher comes as a single great personality in physical form, we have to realise that only an infinitesimal part of humanity could ever come into personal relationship with Him. And yet, if the essence of the Coming is a personal Coming, the personal relationship must be all-important. Even in the matter of recognition and acceptance, a real conviction of His transcendent greatness would be almost impossible without personal contact for hearsay evidence on such a point carries but little weight. And yet all that the rest of us would have to go upon would be: "Mrs Besant says," or: "According to the *London Times*," or "My uncle once met a wonderful Teacher in China, and he told me," and so forth.

Does not, in any case, the restriction of this Coming within the bounds of one personality, one human body and brain, place needless limits to the amount of assistance that can be given to the world in this passage through the Valley of the Shadow? Has it not been tried before, with the tragic results recorded in the Gospel story, and in the history of two thousand years of warring sects? Will that story be repeated? Must not every attempt at the promulgation of an authoritative teaching or the recognition of a supreme earthly leader have, in the nature of things, the same lamentable result?

I confess that to me there seems to be real danger in this widespread pre-occupation with the idea of a single physical Divine Incarnation. The Gospel story is full of lessons and warnings upon the subject which deserve to be taken seriously. It is well to remember, when we are inclined to throw ourselves into the movement for bringing about a general belief among the general public in the Coming of a personal Teacher, that the widespread expectation of a Messiah and the identification of Christ with him, so far from being a help, was actually one of the principal causes of His death and of the rejection of His real message. We are not likely to make the same mistake, but we are exceedingly likely to make a mistake

of the same *kind*, and so pave the way for a terrible and most fatal disillusionment. The real "Coming" may be a much greater and subtler thing than any personal Teacher could be, even as Jesus Christ was infinitely greater as a personal Teacher than any national Messiah, and the expectation of a personal Teacher may conceivably hinder the recognition of the Spiritual Coming of the Son of Man. And if we are inclined to look for new and authoritative statements of doctrine, religious or social, let us remember that Jesus Himself obviously had no intention of founding a religion and gave little or none of the doctrinal teaching which was afterwards organised into religion in His name. The Kingdom of Heaven which He preached is an inner psychological or spiritual condition, not a creed or an organisation or even a system of morality. Is it not therefore more probable that the Second Coming will mean rather the deepening of the spiritual life than anything external? Is there not a danger in leading people to expect any specific "teaching," whether religious, scientific or political? What seems to me a thing greatly to be dreaded is the spirit which, in the absence of direct personal knowledge, is all agog with expectation, ready to run here and there crying "Lord! Lord!" and seeking for a sign; and this spirit is only too easily fostered if attention and hope is concentrated upon the advent of a personality in the outer world. Better, surely, would it be to "make straight the way of the Lord" in the heart, by training the intuition, by helping forward the inner change without which no outer Advent can have any meaning. So shall men be able to recognise the Lord when He comes, in the personality of their neighbour, or perchance their enemy or their servant.

And still humanity cries aloud in its agony: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Once more the whole creation groans and travails, waiting for the coming of the Sons of God. Is the waiting vain? Shall the hope of millions be disappointed? If that were so, if the "end of the world" does not imply the Second Coming, I confess, for my own part, that I see little hope for the world. Without some such help from the spiritual world I think there is a very real prospect that civilisation itself will go under, and that a destruction will come upon mankind comparable only with that of Atlantis. The faculties and the methods to which we are accustomed will not suffice to avert the doom. The inadequacy and the fatal corruption of the old is recognised; mankind is awake to the necessity, not merely of reforms and patches, but a transvaluation of all values, and real *metanoia*, a change of the mind; but we lack the inspiration, the Divine life-giving breath, the creative spirit needed to bring about a new heaven and a new earth. The old forces of desire and self-interest and material intellect grind on — they are grinding themselves to pieces; but of themselves they can never evolve anything new. They work in a closed circle. They can but rearrange existing material into forms of the same order. A kaleidoscope produces endless patterns, but never a work of art. So it is that the endless efforts of able but uninspired men now concentrated upon post-war problems, devising better machinery, cutting away abuses, excellent and indispensable as they are, can in themselves avail nothing. We are being purged, we are driving out the devils that have possessed us. Soon we shall be empty, swept, and garnished; and then — either the Son of Man, or seven devils worse than the first.

Let us lift up our hearts. Without the Crucifixion there can be no Resurrection, and the depth of the despair is the guarantee of the greatness of the approaching birth. Little warrant though there be for expecting the Advent of a Supreme Teacher as an individual, there is every reason to expect the inflow of the Life-giving Spirit which is Himself. Let us look beyond the individual and visualise humanity as a whole, as the mystical Body of Christ. Let us try to understand its psychology by what we know of the workings of the individual human heart, and perhaps we shall have less difficulty in reading the signs of the times. The ferment which we see and feel around us, realised in a greater or less degree by each individual according to his place in the scale of evolution; the gathering of the hosts of Armageddon; the darkening of the spiritual Sun; the pouring of the "vials of the wrath of God" — are the symptoms which in

the individual man precede and herald "conversion" and similar great transformations of attitude and ruling motive. They are comparable with those strange and terrible torments of the soul undergone at certain stages by all who enter the Path, wherein their souls are crucified, dead and buried. They are followed in the individual by a New Birth. And Who and What is then born? The mystic calls Him Christ, and with that birth the pre-occupation with the historical and physical birth of Christ ceases. "Hitherto I have known Christ after the flesh," says St Paul, "henceforth know I Him no more." For the inner birth is felt to be the reality.

And may it not be so with regard to this second World-Coming for which we look? Would not such a Coming, universal, interior, and spiritual, be a far greater and more real and efficacious thing than any conceivable individual physical incarnation?

Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in thee thy soul is all forlorn.

As I see it, though but "through a glass, darkly," the End of the World and the Coming of the Son of Man are indissolubly connected. For me the tremendous drama of the Last Day has always had a profound significance. Since I was a boy the solemn strains of *Dies Iræ, dies illa*, the thrill of expectation which runs through Handel's *Messiah*, the soul-stirring and overpowering imagery of the *Apocalypse*, have never failed to arouse in me a deep response. I have dreamed of it and brooded over it, not as an intellectual problem but as a vital truth engrained in the fabric of the Universe; not as a distant event but as something which I myself shall surely take part in; not with fear but with the solemn expectation of something too great for expression. And its significance has become not less but greater, because what was once, to my childish imagination, a picture of outer events, has become pregnant with inner meaning.

St. Paul, speaking of these things, significantly says: "Behold, I show you a mystery." The drama of the Last Day and the Second Coming is one that is enacted in the human soul, both individually and collectively. The Second Advent is indeed an incarnation, a descent of the Christ into human form. Yet that which stirs me to the depths is the hope, not of a Leader and Teacher in the outer world, but of the Coming of the Christ into the heart of poor suffering and struggling humanity. Short of that nothing can suffice. We may accept and acknowledge an outer Teacher, but only when the Christ comes to the heart does He bring unquestioning certainty and devotion. Salvation and regeneration can only come from within.

I can well believe that the dawn of the new age may be signalised by the entrance into incarnation of many great souls, but I do not picture them to myself as outwardly united or organised in common acknowledgment of some supreme Head in the physical world. Rather do I think of them as men and women of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, leaders it may be of different schools of thought and teaching different spheres of action; unknown — perhaps even opposed to one another in the outer world, neither claiming nor being accorded divine authority or obedience: for the function of the Spirit is everywhere and always not to command or to instruct but to inspire, not to redeem mankind but to help mankind to redeem itself.

Therefore, above all and beyond all, the actual and essential Coming of the Son of Man that I look for is the quickening of all from within rather than the advent of specially dowered individuals.

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. And we shall all be changed, and in Christ shall all be made alive. For the drama of the Second Coming is above all the drama of Initiation, that tremendous event which signifies in the individual the breaking up of the separated self and its reconstitution in the Mystical Body of Christ. For humanity as a whole it is the breaking up of the old order, necessary, irresistible, long foreseen; carrying with it torment unspeakable, darkness, confusion and despair, but to be followed by entry into a higher type of consciousness, by the opening up of new possibilities and new points of view, by a greater realisation of our common brotherhood. Far indeed are we from the period when humanity as a whole will be able to take the stage of Initiation which is possible for its most advanced members, yet the time is at hand when a definite step forward can be taken. The coming of the Christ to all, individually, means that each will receive, not in the same measure, but according to his capacity. For the less advanced masses of humanity this may imply a relatively quite small advance in mutual goodwill and the power of response to higher influences. For those who are approaching the threshold of the Kingdom it may mean the power to pass that threshold. The total and cumulative effect of such an universal increase of faculty may well be stupendous, and may make possible changes in the social order which at present appear to be, and actually are, an impracticable dream. Human nature may indeed be changed, for there is a power that worketh in us and maketh all things new.

So may Christ come, collectively, to humanity.

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Surely I come quickly, Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.