

## Getting Ready for the Climax

F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 15, 1923, page 271.)

Looking abroad over the earth today we cannot fail to be impressed with the extraordinary spirit of unrest that prevails. It has permeated everywhere so thoroughly that no circle, whether national, racial, social, intellectual or religious has escaped its influence, and the most unthinking pleasure-lover that lives quite recognizes its existence. Many explanations of it are offered; the most popular being that of the intellectuals and leaders of modern thought, and of the false religious teachers, who assert that it is the sign of human progress and betterment; that it is the birth-pangs of a new age wherein a better order of man shall appear as the refined product of evolutionary forces, so that we may shortly expect the much-talked-of "superman" to materialise.

True Christians, on the other hand, are awakening to the fact that this unrest and these agitations are but the preliminary tremors that will usher in that hour when the Lord shall "shake, not the earth only, but also heaven." There is, consequently, amongst them also a movement, and an awakening to the coming of the Lord.

Now, just as we have in Scripture the historic record of how a remnant of Israel was prepared of God to welcome and receive the Lord Jesus when first He came, and also how the mass of the nation was hardened by pride, and, consequently, rejected Him and preferred Barabbas, so we find in the New Testament a prophetic record of how saints are to be prepared for His second coming, and of how the world is being prepared for the acceptance of Satan's counterfeit when he appears. We will refer to a few passages in the order in which they occur.

First, then, Matthew 25. In the parable of the Ten Virgins we have an undeniable reference to the Second Advent, and to the proper attitude which becomes the saints left on earth to await the Bridegroom. They are represented as "*virgins*," for the saint is properly speaking one who is separated from the world and uncontaminated by its corruptions and defilements; further, they are virgins who "*went forth to meet the Bridegroom*," that is, they publicly took the separate place with the Bridegroom in view. How fully this was verified in the early Christians may be seen in the opening chapters of the Acts, and in 1 Thessalonians 1. The Bridegroom tarried, however, and sleep supervened with all.

Then came an awakening. The cry at midnight was, "Behold the Bridegroom!" and, consequently, "Go ye *out* to meet Him." This resulted in the virgins arising, and trimming their lamps. The foolish discover their fatal lack too late. The wise are ready and go in. Here we have a prophetic sketch of what is in process of fulfilment, as we believe, in our own days. The expectation of the Lord's return has been revived, and He Himself has been set forth as the Object, and rallying Centre before the hearts of His saints, and there has been a reverting to the original position of the saints as a people separated from the world, and, consequently, a disentanglement is being effected; the wise are being disentangled from the foolish.

Here, then, in our first Scripture, we have the whole case in general outline. Two currents flowing in opposite directions are discernible, the one towards apostasy and doom, the other towards faithfulness and glory. In the one case we see represented that which is outward and nominal, profession without reality in the absence of the Spirit of God. In the other we see that which is real, as possessing the Spirit of God, awakened from former lethargy and insensibility to alertness and expectancy, and characterized by the three features already pointed out, but which we recapitulate if

thereby they may be more deeply impressed on all our hearts.

1. Christ, the Bridegroom, is by the Spirit's cry again set forth as the supreme Object. His coming is once more regarded as imminent, and therefore a matter of lively expectation. He becomes to faith the rallying Centre; "to meet Him," and no other, is now their supreme desire.

2. The Spirit's cry is, "*go ye out* to meet Him." As originally they "went forth" before the lapse occurred, so now they must "go out." They must revert to the position held at the beginning. No matter how comfortable and apparently sensible many of the arrangements they made for their period of peaceful slumber, all must be discarded for that which God originally appointed.

3. Christ, as supreme Object and Hope and rallying Centre, involves a work of separation and disentanglement. The line of cleavage became perfectly clear *before* the Bridegroom came. It was consummated and made irrevocable at His coming.

To some of our readers the above will seem commonplace enough as being merely a repetition of what they have long been instructed in and held; to others it may appear novel and open to question. To the latter we merely say, Search into Scripture further with us and see if it be not in accord with its general drift and tenor. On the former, however, we have to urge that their very familiarity with the truth of it may be their undoing. If those called out at the beginning lapsed into sleep is it impossible that we should do so? To ask the question is to answer it. The whole point here is one of the affections and heart-faithfulness. True, the separate position was taken, but as the fruit of revived affections and expectations. Is it worth anything, even if outwardly maintained, should those affections and expectations with any one of us once more lapse into slumber? *We think not.*

Here, as we have said, all is presented to us in a general outline. Nothing is said enabling us to judge of the exact mode of the separation effected, nor as to what are its boundaries, if we may so speak. For all such details we must go elsewhere, and particularly to the epistles of Paul to Timothy.

Before these epistles, however, come those to the Thessalonians, and in 2 Thess. 2 we have remarkable light as to the way the climax of evil will be reached after the fulfilment of 1 Thess. 4: 13-17, which is referred to in 2 Thess. 2: 1 as "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our gathering together unto Him." Three things stand out very clearly in that chapter, which we will summarize as follows:-

1. Intense human activity, *bringing man to a climax*. There is to be "a falling away" — an apostasy. This means great activity in the region of *mind*. The *thinking* of religious mankind will be subverted. There is to be a perfect landslide in religious thought, obliterating all the old landmarks. Or if, perchance, old terms are retained, they will be emptied of all their old meaning and given new values totally destructive of the old, — just as in a landslide trees and other objects are sometimes retained upright and alive, but totally uprooted and removed from the old positions. Further, this great *movement* is going to produce a *man*, as so often before in the world's history, and in this "man of sin," this lawless one, human wickedness will, in that hour, find its highest expression.

2. Intense Satanic activity, *bringing the powers of darkness to a climax*. The coming of that wicked one is to be "after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders." The forces of spiritual wickedness will then be let loose on the earth, and hence "all deceivableness of unrighteousness" will be exerted towards "them that perish: because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." Miraculous powers are, indeed, to be again manifested in connection with religious professions and claims, but they will proceed from Satan, and be used to blind his dupes effectually.

3. A Divine fiat on God's part, *putting His seal upon man's climax unto its destruction*. What men will proudly regard as the enduring monument raised to celebrate man's glory, turns out to be the dirty sepulchre wherein it is to go to corruption, and God puts His seal upon that sepulchre by the sending forth of "strong delusion" as an act of His holy government, and no man can roll away the stone when once that is done.

What a climax! What a picture! Let us gaze at it steadily until its reality sinks into our souls. We shall then turn away from it burdened on the one hand with desire and compassion for souls who may yet be rescued from the burning, yet, on the other, full of rejoicing that our links with it are cut. We shall sing with new emphasis,

"O worldly pomp and glory,

Your charms are spread in vain!

I've heard a sweeter story!

I've found a truer gain!"

even if it be the pomp and glory of the *religious* world that is in question.

Judging from the conditions which are now rapidly coming to a head in Christendom, the climax cannot be far off. Man's mental activity grows fast and furious. It seems to be well-nigh a point of honour with each oncoming generation to overturn and discard the ideas of the previous generation. The landslide has pretty clearly commenced, and Satan's interference is becoming a commonplace under the influence of spiritism and kindred cults. Let the saints be raptured to heaven and all would come to a head in an incredibly short space of time, and the God-sent delusion drop like a funeral pall over the minds of apostate men.

In 2 Timothy 2: 15 to 2 Timothy 4: 5 we have a wonderful passage giving us light as to the development of evil in the sphere of Christian profession, and the path of a faithful believer, up to even "the last days." Here we trace the course of the two currents leading up to the climax. In 2 Timothy 3: 1-5 we see what will characterise the mass of Christendom just before the rapture of the saints. The form of godliness is retained. Its power is not only *absent* but *denied*; they are "lovers of their own selves," "lovers of money" — for so the word "covetous" may be translated — "lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God."

The path of a faithful believer is simple and clear. First, again, comes separation unto the Lord, 2 Timothy 2. There is disentanglement. As disentangled the believer is left as "the servant of the Lord," who in all his service must display the character of his Master. He must always remember that he is not a lord but a servant of THE LORD, and meekness becomes a *servant*. Further, he suffers persecution and stands irrevocably on "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture." He accepts *all* Scripture as God-breathed, and as sufficient to furnish throughout the man of God, and not merely the ordinary believer. The opening of 2 Timothy 4 makes it evident that not only does the faithful believer take his stand on Scripture, but he propagates it. He preaches "*the Word*." Note carefully the inferences that lie just here. If *all* Scripture is given that the man of God may be "thoroughly furnished unto *all* good works," then, firstly, no part of Scripture can be safely disregarded; and, secondly, no work — not even a so-called "Christian work" — is a *good* work if it is not directly or indirectly sanctioned by Scripture. Further, the course of the apostle's revelations as to the last days, and his instructions to Timothy, show that to his mind the acceptance of "all Scripture" provided a perfect criterion and test. In the light of this, the attitude towards Scripture, of any would-be teacher, is final and conclusive; we need not trouble to investigate his further credentials if he fails on this point.

The course of the one current then runs from the profane and vain babblings of the time of Hymenaeus and Philetus to the perilous times of the last days, the heaping to themselves false teachers, having itching ears, and turning to fables — all this ready for the terrible drama of 2 Thessalonians 2. The course of the other current is marked by "the vessel unto honour," "the servant of the Lord," living "godly in Christ Jesus" and suffering persecution, abiding in the things learned with all Scripture as the rock beneath one's feet, and, finally, preaching "the word." This leads up to "that day" and "the crown of righteousness."

If we turn from Paul to Peter and read 2 Peter 2 and 2 Peter 3, we find the same features under different forms. There are the false teachers, who, like the false prophets of old, privily bring in "damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them," and thus drag souls with them in the current of evil. They in so doing "promise them liberty" — this is exactly the great cry today, people are being "liberated" from bondage to "old religious ideas" and from "bibliolatry," the term they use for acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God — but really they engulf them in the corruptions of the world like dogs returning to their own vomit, or washed sows returning to their wallowing in the mire. They end by scoffing at the bare idea of a returning Christ, on the ground of the uniform and unvarying course of nature. This is, remarkably enough, exactly the ground now taken by the modern "scientific" scoffer; he believes in slow and orderly evolution, and denies the possibility of any catastrophic intervention of God.

On the other hand, Peter tells us of the "holy prophets," and bids us be mindful of their words and also of the words spoken by "the apostles of the Lord and Saviour" — in other words mindful of both Old and New Testament Scriptures. He points out that, knowing the truth and warned beforehand of what is impending, we should be marked by "holy" or "separate" conversation and godliness, and thus continue growing "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Finally, turning for a moment to John's writings, we find in Revelation 2 and 3 the prophetic addresses to the seven churches. The closing phases of the Church's history are Philadelphia and Laodicea. The very names are significant — "Love of the brethren," and "Rights of the people," respectively.

It is by love of the brethren that we show that we are born of God and have passed from death unto life, and also manifest our love to God Himself; and the "Philadelphia" of Rev. 3 bears the features that mark Divine life, and also the features that characterize faithfulness. Christ's word is kept; His Name is not denied; the word of His patience is kept. Translation to glory out of the hour of earth's great tribulation is the end.

At the present moment "the rights of the people" loom largely in all directions. and are now well established in the region of religion. We are in the age of "democratised Christianity." Political democracy finds all its authority in the will of the people. In that sphere there are no fixed standards of right and wrong. If the majority of the people want it, be it betting, intoxicants, opium, war, or anything else, it is *politically right*. If they do not want it, be it the Bible in the schools, liberty for the preaching of Christ, temperance, peace, or anything else, it is *politically wrong*. Even so also then in democratised Christianity, man and his will is everything. God and His Christ, and their word, are nothing.

In Laodicea Christ is outside, and supreme self-satisfaction is within. In reality there is nothing but wretchedness, misery, poverty, blindness, and nakedness. All is indifference and nauseating, and the end will be utter rejection at the hands of Christ. He will spue it out of His mouth.

With "Philadelphia" translated and "Laodicea" spued out, all will be ready for the apostasy and the man of sin as we have seen in 2 Thessalonians 2.

As another year reaches its close the sky of Christendom is dark and darkening. Are we downhearted? No, thank God, for "the path of the just is as the shining light [the light of dawn] that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4: 18). We are not going back, not even back to Pentecost, but on to glory! Only let us beware of that swiftly flowing current which is getting Christendom ready for antichrist and his delusions. Let us rather joyfully go in that other current which finds its impulse in the Spirit of God, which is marked by fidelity to the Word of God and single-eyed *obedience* to it, which eventuates in love of the brethren, keeping Christ's Word and not denying His Name. And if yet we wait a while for His coming let us keep the word of His patience by faithfully following the rejected One in full identification with His interests and in true separation to Him from this present evil world.