ESCHATOLOGY in Christian Art.

By the Editor.

Eschatology, or the doctrine of the last things, commands no longer the same important position in the Christian churches as it did at the beginning of the Christian era. The imagination of the early Christians was full of the subject. The Apostles, the Church Fathers, and other Christian writers of legends and martyr-stories speak constantly of the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, the torments of hell, of eternal life in heaven; and it is even difficult for the Christians of to-day to realise the extraordinary strain which in past times these ideas exercised upon the minds of the people. Nevertheless, the extraordinary fear of the day of judgment, as the end of the world, was natural enough at an age in which astronomy and kindred sciences that reveal to us the nature, origin, and future fate of our planet were still in their swaddling clothes. Indeed we must be blind not to recognise the fact that the throes which attended the birth of early Christianity consisted mainly of the fears of the fires of hell and the anxiety to escape the universal doom of mankind that was supposed to be near at hand. The key-note of the sentiment among the first congregations is expressed in St. Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians, where he says:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand."

St. Paul's belief "that the day of Christ is at hand" is based upon Christ's own utterances. We read in Mark ix, 1:

"And he (Jesus) said unto them: 'Verily I say unto you that there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.'"

That in this passage the second advent of Christ is referred to
there can be no doubt, especially as there are parallel passages which are written in the same spirit. In Matthew x, 23, Christ declares that his disciples preaching the Gospel in Palestine and fleeing from one city to another when persecuted for his name’s sake, "shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come."

St. Paul confidently expected that he himself would see the day of the Lord, and in consideration of its nearness he deemed all worldly care unnecessary. Having explained in his first epistle to the Corinthians the significance of the events in Jewish history and the punishments of sinners, he adds:

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come."1 (1 Cor. x, ii).

When some of the Thessalonian Christians died, he comforted them by declaring that those who sleep will be resurrected and taken together up to heaven with those who survive. And the words of Paul expressly implied that he himself, together with the Thessalonians whom he addresses, will remain, of which fact he is so sure as to pronounce his opinion as being "the word of the Lord." He says:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

When the early disciples became more and more disappointed at the non-appearance of the Lord in the clouds of heaven, a prominent leader of the Christian Church wrote an epistle to revive their faith, which was apt to suffer by the ridicule of those who did not share this belief. We read in the second epistle of St. Peter:

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

"That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior:

1τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων. See also Heb. ix, 26, where the appearance of Christ is said to have taken place at the consummation of the time (ἐπὶ συντελεία τῶν αἰώνων).
"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

"And saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.'

". . . The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

"Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The newly discovered fourth book of Daniel \(^1\) contains the sad story of a certain man, holding the office of president (προεστῶς) in a Christian congregation of Syria, who "persuaded many of the brethren, with their wives and children, to go out into the wilderness to meet the Christ, and they went wandering in the mountains and wastes, there losing their way; and the end was that all but a few were apprehended as robbers and would have been executed by the mayor of the city (ηγεμόν) had it not been that his wife was a believer and that in response to her entreaties he put a stop to the proceedings to prevent a persecution arising because of them."

Cases of this kind happened frequently. We read of another Christian officer (also a προεστῶς) in Pontus that he also preached the approaching day of judgment. "He brought the brethren to such a pitch of fear and trembling that they abandoned their lands and fields, letting them become waste, and sold, the most of them, their possessions."

The belief in the imminent approach of the day of judgment waned during the third century, but was revived in the year 1000, which was commonly believed to be the end of the millennium prophesied by St. John the Divine in the Revelation. The disorder and misery which resulted from the foolish acts that people committed in anticipation of the approaching day of judgment all over Christendom are beyond description. Some squandered their property in order to enjoy the last days of their lives, some sold all they had and gave to the poor; some invested all their posses-

\(^1\) Edited by Dr. Ed. Bratke, Bonn, 1891.
sions in masses and church donations, and thus almost all who were filled with the belief in the coming of the Lord fell a prey to the most wretched poverty and distress.

The hope of eternal bliss in heaven is among most of the Christian fathers strongly mixed with the expectation of the endless sufferings of their enemies. Heaven and hell are conceived as inverting the present order of things. Dives is not punished for his sins and Lazarus is not rewarded for good deeds, their future fate is the result of an equalisation, as we read in Luke xvi, 25:

"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.'"

The bliss of heaven appears partly to consist in witnessing the torments of hell. St. John the Divine simply follows the style of previous writers of prophecies and revelations when indulging with great delight in the anticipations of the plagues that will come over this world and of the punishment that will be meted out to Rome,
War in Heaven.
After the Revelation of St. John. (By Albrecht Dürer.)
the new Babylon, the woman of abomination. This anticipation of plagues is an inheritance that Christianity had received from the Jews, who had suffered badly at the hands of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Syrians, and Romans. It is un-Christian for any one to indulge in such hopes of divine wrath inflicted upon his
religious adversaries; and happily the main prophecy of the Jewish Christian author of the revelation was not fulfilled. By a strange irony of fate Judaic Christianity disappeared from the face of the

earth, while Rome became the centre of the Gentile Christianity, in which capacity she rose almost to more glorious power than pagan Rome ever possessed through her political superiority. Christianity was thoroughly Romanised and remained under the
sway of Rome until the Reformation split the Church in twain and opened new possibilities for a progressive development of Christianity, no longer subject to the dictates of a conclave of Italian cardinals and a Roman pope.

Eschatological views at the time of Luther were still in many respects similar to the belief in Christ’s second advent during early Christianity. Luther thought that the world would scarcely abide longer than a few decades, and, not unlike St. Paul, deemed it quite natural that he himself might still witness in the body the coming of the Lord.
Since Luther’s times eschatological views have changed considerably. The Christian belief in resurrection has been spiritualised and there is a tendency among the most advanced and earnest theologians of to-day to interpret the old eschatological doctrines in the spirit of science. Since we know definitely what the nature of the earth is like, since we understand its origin and have better ideas as to its probable fate in the future, it has become an impossibility to remain under the influence of the crude beliefs of former centuries. But while the literal belief of the mythology in which the ideas of the end of man and of this world has been surrendered, the religious leaders of to-day are endeavoring the more earnestly to preserve their moral significance; and in this respect the eschatological conceptions have not lost their paramount importance in religion, although their influence, like that of antiseptics, appears to be purely negative.

Religion, if it has any right to existence at all, must be able to comfort man, to render him strong in the face of his own death
as well as in the contemplation of the discontinuance of all life on our planet. There is a deep truth in the prophecies of the end of the world, and we must learn to understand that while all things,

**The Last Judgment.** After Michelangelo. (Sistine Chapel.)

great as well as small, the most insignificant mote as well as entire universes, will be dissolved into their elements, that there are yet things which will never decay. Justice, righteousness, and truth are immortal. The world changes, but the laws of the world remain the
same forever and aye. All material combinations will be broken up into their parts. But the eternal types of existence, the ideas, as Plato calls them, the Logoi and the entirety of the logoi, i. e., the Logos, or the cosmic order in its immutable harmony, will remain forever and aye.

These things are not non-entities, they are the most real features of reality. Although immaterial, they shape the evolution of all material objects; although not concrete but absolute, they condition the nature of all concrete existences; although superphysical (or, if you please, supernatural), they are the raison d'être of all physics.

These things are what philosophers call the purely formal. They are universal, for they are not here nor there, but everywhere. They are immutable, for they cannot be different from what they are; they are intrinsically necessary. They are eternal, for they do not exist to-day only with the possibility of being no longer applicable to-morrow. They are above time and space. They are supercosmic, for they shape not only the present world, but are the conditions of all possible cosmic evolution.

These things are not, as is the material world, an immense heap of single atoms; they constitute one grand concord, a divine harmony, an eternal unison in which truth, righteousness, and beauty are aspects only of one and the same actuality. Their unity is in religious terminology expressed in the word God.

These things, in brief, are the uncreated, which, when reflected in living creatures, appear as reason; they are the spiritual or the formative feature of existence, which, when developing in sentient beings, becomes mind, they are the ultimate measure of what is right, the standard and norm of goodness, which, when dominating the motives of man, manifests itself in moral aspiration.

That man who by his life-actions gives evidence that God, the uncreated, eternal, and universal order of existence, animates his soul, will fearlessly contemplate the dissolution of his own body as well as of the whole world-system to which he in his bodily existence belongs, for he knows that what is essential in him is immortal, the ideas that ensoul him are indestructible. His spirit is rooted in the immortal, and the end of his life, although a dissolution of the body, is not a dissolution of the divinity which has begotten him, which constitutes the characteristic and main features of his being and dominates all the impulses of his soul.