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## The Christ of the Gospel.

No. V.—“ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN.”

### I.

THE belief, hitherto so widely held, that the New Testament gives us an account of a single Ascension of Christ occurring forty days after the Resurrection has involved commentators and harmonists in insuperable difficulties. If, following Holy Scripture as we believe, we consider the Ascension narrated at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles as the final one of a series, and the one to which the greatest importance is attached because of its finality and its marking the preparation for Pentecost, the difficulties alluded to disappear, and with them a strained exegesis which betrayed its own uneasiness.

On the Resurrection morning the Lord was seen by Mary Magdalene, who said to her: “Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to the Father: but go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend (*ἀναβαίνω*) to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.”<sup>1</sup> This passage has caused difficulties merely because of the prejudice in favour of a single Ascension. But for this prejudice it would have been taken in its simple meaning—our Lord bids Mary not to touch Him (*μή μου ἅπτου*<sup>2</sup>), since He has not yet ascended, but to go and tell His brothers that He was ascending, not in the future, but *now* to His Father, who was also their Father. This explains at once the use of the present tense *ἀναβαίνω*, its contrast with *ἀναβέβηκα*, and, what is so natural, the solicitude of Jesus for his brothers, the sons of Mary His mother.<sup>3</sup> Beyschlag, noting that our

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 17.

<sup>2</sup> The imperative may well be conative (*cf.* Moulton’s “Prolegomena,” p. 125). *ἅπτομαι* occurs over thirty times in the N.T., and in all these places can be rendered “touch.” The R.V. margin renders here “Take not hold on me,” to avoid the *seeming* inconsistency with Matt. xxviii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> “It ought to be hardly necessary to say that the notion of a return of Jesus to his heavenly Father immediately after his resurrection is by no means inconsistent with the Church doctrine of his ascension at the end of the forty days. This last is simply his final departure, made visible because it was final” (Milligan, “The Resurrection of our Lord,” p. 236, note).

Lord forbade Mary Magdalene to touch Him, and yet later in the day allowed other women to take hold of His feet (Matt. xxviii. 9), regards the latter incident as unhistorical.<sup>1</sup> Interpose an invisible Ascension, and the difficulty vanishes; what was permissible after Ascension was not permissible before (*cf.*, too, Luke xxiv. 39).

This passage (John xx. 17) is, however, not the only one which indicates that our Lord ascended immediately after the Resurrection. It is implied in the last discourses that He would do so. When He speaks of His going to the Father, He tells them that this event must happen before they can see Him again :

“A little while, and ye behold me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me. Some of his disciples said therefore, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye behold me not; and again a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We know not what he saith. Jesus perceived that they were desirous to ask him, and he said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves concerning this, that I said, A little while, and ye behold me not; and again a little while, and ye shall see me? . . . ye now have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice (*καὶ χαρήσεται ὑμῶν ἡ καρδιά*).”<sup>2</sup>

With this last clause compare xx. 20: “The disciples therefore were glad (*ἐχάρησαν*) when they saw the Lord.” When speaking to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, our Lord uses a mode of speech which possibly involves the idea that He had already ascended at the beginning of the day: “Behoved it not the Christ to have suffered these very things, and to have entered into his glory?”—*οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν Χριστὸν, καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*;<sup>3</sup> On the evening of the same day our Lord appears to the disciples—“the eleven and them that were with them,” as St. Luke (xxiv. 33) tells us—and “breathed

<sup>1</sup> “Leben Jesu,” vol. i., pp. 410, 411.

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 16-19, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xxiv. 26. See, however, Plummer, “Intern. Critical Com.,” p. 555.

on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John xx. 19-23). This gift, increased and perfected at Pentecost, implies an Ascension of our Lord, for it was not till He had been glorified that such a gift was available for men (John vii. 39, xvi. 7); and it was owing to Ascension that He was able to say: "All power was given to me (*ἐδόθη μοι*) in heaven and on the earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18).<sup>1</sup>

The nature of our Lord's priestly office requires an immediate Ascension after the Resurrection. He is our High-Priest; and the ceremonial on the Day of Atonement was typical of the sacrificial work of Christ. As He was just about to enter into the most holy place on His meeting with Mary Magdalene, the prohibition, "Touch me not," became plain. On the Day of Atonement the high-priest, after the sacrifice for the sins of the whole people had been slain, immediately carried the blood into the most holy place and sprinkled it before the mercy-seat, making intercession for the people. So in Heb. i. 3 the sacrifice and the Ascension are connected—"when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The objection, derived from the passage ix. 12 of the same Epistle—"He entered in once for all (*ἐφάπαξ*) into the holy place"—that our Lord made but one entrance into heaven rests on a misunderstanding. A careful study of the whole chapter shows that the meaning is that as Christ did not suffer in every age, but "once (*ἄπαξ*) at the end of the ages" (ver. 26), so He did not enter heaven at every age, but in *one age* of the world. The expression applied to the high-priest in verse 7, "once in the year," does not mean that he entered once only into the most holy place on the Day of Atonement; for, as a matter of fact, Lev. xvi. 13-15 implies more than one entrance, and the Talmudic tract, "Yōmā," tells us that he went in four times, first with the incense, then with the blood of the bullock, then with that of the goat, and finally to remove the censer and

<sup>1</sup> Moulton, "Proleg.," p. 140, puts the aorist amongst those of "things just happened," though allowing that some of the examples he quotes may be otherwise explained.

the coal-pan after the evening sacrifice had been offered.<sup>1</sup> Christ entered the most holy place once for all for a particular purpose, to present His own blood, not yearly as the high-priest, with blood not his own (ver. 25, ἐν αἵματι ἄλλοτριῶ).

The Ascension described in the closing words of St. Luke's Gospel—

“And he led them out until they were over against Bethany : and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them [[and was carried up into heaven]]. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy : and were continually in the temple, blessing God ”<sup>2</sup>—

is not to be identified with the final one which took place from the Mount of Olives, but is one recorded as having taken place at the close of the day of the Resurrection.<sup>3</sup> Those who wish to harmonize this account with that of the Acts find it necessary to interpolate a period of forty days somewhere in the narrative of Luke xxiv. 36-50, either between verses 43 and 44, or between verses 49 and 50. But it is clear that St. Luke is in this chapter narrating a series of events which took place on the same day (*cf.* ver. 13, ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ); and there is force in Professor Whiston's contention : “I am sure that if we saw an history with the like plain circumstances of time in Herodotus or Livy, we should make no scruple to assert that it belonged to the very time at first mentioned ; and why the sacred writers should not be supposed as careful at least and as accurate as the profane, I do by no means understand.”<sup>4</sup> Professor Lake points out that from the use of εἶπεν δέ (“and he said,” ver. 44), characteristic of St. Luke both in Gospel and Acts to indicate the continuation of a narrative, we have a corroboration of the general impression that no intervals of time are to be interjected into the narrative.<sup>5</sup> It is true that the text of verse 51 gives

<sup>1</sup> Yōmā, Mishna, v. 1-3. *Cf.* also Josephus, “Antiq.,” iii. 10; Bedmidbar Rabbah, vii.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 50-53.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, A., “St. Luke's Gospel in Greek,” p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> “Essays and Sermons,” p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> “Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” p. 108.

some difficulty, the words put between double brackets, "and was carried up into heaven," being omitted by some ancient authorities; and it is thus suggested that we have no Ascension account at all in the Gospel, this Western non-interpolation, as it is called, being no part of the true text.<sup>1</sup> But we think the Revisers of 1881 have retained the words rightly, and that they were omitted in ancient authorities by scribes who saw that the accounts of the Gospel and Acts could not be harmonized and who were unwilling to allow more than one Ascension. Moreover, we have some internal evidence that St. Luke's Gospel ended with an Ascension. The passage—

"And it came to pass, when the days were being fulfilled that he should be received up (*τῆς ἀναλήμψεως αὐτοῦ*) he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem"<sup>2</sup>—

would suggest that an *ἀναλήμψις*—*i.e.*, an Ascension—would be chronicled. And that it was is certain from St. Luke's own subsequent statements. In his preface to the Acts of the Apostles he tells us that the former treatise contained an account of "all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day" (*i.e.*, the day of the Resurrection) "in which he was taken up (*ἀνελήμφθη*)"; and again he refers to the period of our Lord's ministry as "beginning from the baptism of John unto the same day that he was taken up from us" (Acts ii. 22).<sup>3</sup>

The view taken of Ascension on the day of the Resurrection has some support outside the evidence of the New Testament. In the Epistle of Barnabas (xv. 9) occurs the following passage: "We keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in which also Jesus arose from the dead and having been manifested ascended into heaven" (*ἀνέβη εἰς οὐρανοῦς*); thus affirming that Resurrection and Ascension took place on the same day, though Raggénbach suggests that the Ascension is introduced by Barnabas after

<sup>1</sup> Westcott and Hort, "Notes on Selected Readings," p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ix. 51.

<sup>3</sup> The difficulty of all the events narrated in Luke xxiv. occurring on one day is well met by Lake, *op. cit.*, pp. 108, 109.

the Resurrection merely to emphasize the fact that Christ was no longer subject to death, and H. Smith<sup>1</sup> that the statement merely emphasizes the Apostolic view that the Ascension is regarded as the complement of the Resurrection. But there is nothing either in the immediate context or elsewhere in the Epistle of Barnabas to substantiate these opinions.

In the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, dated early second century by Harnack, the Ascension is connected with the Crucifixion :

“And the Lord cried out, My power, my power, hast thou forsaken me? And when he had said this he was taken up”

(chap. v. ; *cf.* Orig., Matt., 140) ; and later in the book, chap. xiii., is placed *before* any appearances :

“And they [Mary Magdalene and her friends] . . . see a young man sitting in the midst of the tomb . . . who said to them, Wherefore are ye come? Whom seek ye? Him that was crucified? He is risen and gone.”

The curious interpolation before Mark xvi. 4 in the Old Latin Codex *k* (Bobiensis) should also be noticed in this connection. It runs : “Subito autem ad horam tertiam tenebræ diei factæ sunt per totum orbem terræ et descenderunt de cælis angeli et surgent in claritate vivi dei *ascenderunt cum eo* et continuo lux facta est tunc illæ accesserunt ad monumentum et vident revolutum lapidem fuit enim magnus nimis.”

We now pass on to the account of the final Ascension given by St. Luke in the opening verses of the Acts of the Apostles (i. 1-12).<sup>2</sup> A comparison of this passage with Luke xxiv. shows much in common, and this can the better be grasped if we arrange the parallelism thus :

<sup>1</sup> “The Creeds: their History, Nature, and Use,” p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> We cannot follow those who would not refer the assembly of verses 6 *ff.* to that mentioned in verse 4. See Knowling, “Expositor’s Greek Testament,” vol. ii. p. 55.

## ST. LUKE.

1. "Over against (ἐως πρὸς) Bethany . . . He parted from them" (ver. 50; cf. xix. 29, 30).

2. "Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" (ver. 49).

3. "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things" (ver. 47, 48).

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

1. "They returned from the mount called Olivet" (ver. 12). "He was taken up" (ver. 9).

2. "He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father . . . ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost . . . ye shall receive power," etc. (ver. 4-8).

3. "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (ver. 8).

The words of our Lord in both passages are substantially the same; the place of ascension need not be different;<sup>1</sup> but new features in Acts are the time, the fortieth day after the Resurrection (ver. 3); and the circumstantial details, the appearance of the two men in white apparel,<sup>2</sup> the conversation, etc. If we consider these ascensions to be identical, we must interject, as mentioned above, a space of forty days somewhere in St. Luke's Gospel account, a device which is "a despairing clutch of harmonistics"; or we must suppose that between writing his two accounts of the same event St. Luke obtained further information as to the time of the Ascension which he has incorporated in his later treatise.<sup>3</sup> This is arbitrary conjecture; and so careful a writer as St. Luke (see Preface to the Gospel) would have given some explanation of his mistake and retracted it. To Theophilus the matter was clear, for he was aware that no contradiction could exist between accounts in the Lucan writings of Ascensions which took place at different periods, one on the Resurrection day, the other forty days after, the latter naturally introducing the history of the

<sup>1</sup> See Van Osterzee, "Com. on St. Luke," p. 444; Swete, "Appearances after the Passion," p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Latham ("Risen Master," p. 402) thinks these are not angels, mainly because of the tone of their address. It is suggested they may be Essenes.

<sup>3</sup> Brant, "Die Evang. Ges. und der Ursprung des Christentums," pp. 370 ff.



Church which was to follow in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles.

Harnack<sup>1</sup> draws attention to the position the Ascension takes in the fragment of the old Christian hymn preserved by the author of the Pastoral Epistles,

"Ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί,  
ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι,  
ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις,  
ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν,  
ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ,  
ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ,"<sup>2</sup>

as confirming the ideas of some (*cf.* Irenæus, i. 3, 2; 30, 14; "Ascensio Isaiah," p. 43; "Pistis Sophia," p. 1), who maintained the existence of a longer period between the Resurrection and the final Ascension than the forty days of Acts.<sup>3</sup> But we must bear in mind that a chronological sequence need not be maintained, the last five clauses being consequences of the Resurrection, to which the first clause refers, and the last clause by a well-known brachylogy (*ἀνελήμφθη εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἐστὶν ἐν δόξῃ*) connecting the assumption of Christ with the position in which He finds Himself continuing, and so forming a natural conclusion to the hymn.

St. Matthew's Gospel gives us no account of the Ascension; but it is difficult to think that it was not in the mind of the author when he wrote the concluding scene of his narrative. In the Revised Version the passage runs:

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came unto them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and upon earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them

<sup>1</sup> "History of Dogma," vol. i., p. 203 (English translation).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16: "He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory" (R.V.)

<sup>3</sup> Swete, "The Apostles' Creed," pp. 69, 70.

to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you : and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." <sup>1</sup>

The passage is closely allied to that of Acts i. 6-9,—the mention of the eleven disciples only (contrast Luke xxiv. 33) ; the scene on the mountain (τὸ ὄρος) ; the words of Jesus are similar in content (cf. vers. 19, 20 with Acts i. 8) ; whilst the promise, " Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," is plainly a word of farewell.<sup>2</sup> That the visible Ascension should not be mentioned is agreeable with the plan of the first Gospel, which finds a natural conclusion in the majestic picture of the Messiah, Jewish and Daniel-like (cf. Dan. ii. 38, vii. 14, 25 ff.), claiming all authority in heaven and earth.<sup>3</sup>

The original ending of St. Mark's Gospel being lost, we cannot say whether that Gospel contained any account of the Ascension. The longer alternative ending given in the Revised Version (xvi. 9-20), possibly the composition of the Aristion mentioned by Papias, a disciple of the Lord, would lead us to think that its author, like St. Luke, contemplated an Ascension as taking place at the end of the day of the Resurrection. If Blass's theory be established, that St. Mark is the source of St. Luke's information for the history of the Jerusalem church narrated in the earlier chapters of the Acts, then in all probability the Gospel of St. Mark closed with an account of the Ascension.<sup>4</sup>

That St. John does not give us any account of the visible Ascension need not surprise us when we consider the purpose for which his Gospel was written (xx. 30, 31). He has no account of the birth of Christ or of the institution of the Lord's Supper, yet he was certainly not ignorant of these facts.<sup>5</sup> Since

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 16-20.

<sup>2</sup> " St. Matthew, who does not record the event, is the best interpreter of its meaning, ' Lo, I am with you alway.' Ascension is rather the festival of Christ's presence in the world than of his departure from it" (*Expository Times*, 1900, p. 155).

<sup>3</sup> Schmidt, " Biblical Theology of the New Testament," p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Blass, " Acta Apost.," § 4 ; " Philology of Gospels," pp. 141 ff. See also Briggs, " New Light on the Life of Jesus," pp. 112 ff.

<sup>5</sup> See THE CHURCHMAN, February 1915, p. 95.

throughout his Gospel he selects his facts for a particular purpose we cannot say that he was ignorant of the Ascension ; and such passages as vi. 62, xiv. 12, xvi. 28, xvii. 4, 5, xx. 17, prove beyond question that he knew Christ to have ascended into heaven.

## II.

The historicity of the tradition narrated in the Acts is indubitable. No writer of the apostolic age was capable of forging such a narrative. The question, "Lord, art thou at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (ver. 6), is one which mirrors the expectation of the times, and which a later generation would hardly attribute to the Apostles. The Jews pictured a Messiah who should remain on earth, and the national character of the Apostles' hopes revealed in the question affords no groundwork for the construction of an Ascension myth.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the quiet restraint of the narrative, its simple phraseology, its freedom from such accretions as mark legendary growths, commend it to an unprejudiced reader as derived from an eye-witness of the scene.

In the Pauline Epistles we have but three allusions to the Ascension as an event—viz., Eph. iv. 10 : "He that descended (*ὁ καταβὰς*) is the same also as he that ascended (*ὁ ἀναβὰς*) far above all the heavens"; 1 Thess. iv. 16 : "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven"—descent implying a previous ascent ; and the passage, 1 Tim. iii. 16, quoted above. But throughout the fact is assumed ; and we may account for the absence of biographical material by the consideration that the Ascension had not the same evidential value as the Resurrection, that St. Paul was writing to Churches which had already received instruction from himself or others, and that he wished to bring especially before his readers the living and exalted Saviour.<sup>2</sup> In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of Christ as

<sup>1</sup> "That Christ ascended, *according to the Scriptures*, was never an article of the Creed. The Ascension of the Messiah had not been part of the Jewish expectation" (E. R. E. ii, p. 153).

<sup>2</sup> "Cambridge Theological Essays," pp. 426-428.

one "who hath passed through the heavens" (*διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς*, iv. 14); and, again, as "made higher than the heavens" (*ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν γενόμενος*, vii. 26). St. Peter clearly distinguishes the Ascension from the Resurrection<sup>1</sup>—"through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven." From these passages (and others might be added to them<sup>2</sup>) it will be seen that the indirect evidence for the historicity is strong.

Both the person and work of Christ claim Ascension. There is no incongruity in the passing from the world in a mysterious manner of Him who entered it in so unique a fashion. "The Person of God, the eternal Word, assumed human nature—not a human person, but human nature—so that God might be able, acting in and through this human nature as His instrument to teach mankind and to die for mankind. God entered on the sphere of the seen and the temporal by a miraculous door. His life and work were marked all through by miracle; His death and Resurrection were encompassed with miracle, and it was fitting that his departure from this world should be through another miraculous door. The departure of the Eternal King was, like his first approach, a part of a scheme which forms one united and harmonious whole. The Incarnation and the Ascension were necessarily related the one to the other."<sup>3</sup> Jesus must go to God as He came forth from God. His unity with the Father, eternally real in the spiritual sense, must be historically realized. If, indeed, He be the Christ, He must go to heaven after the resurrection from the dead—"whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things"<sup>4</sup>—and it was not till His Ascension that a perfectly satisfactory

<sup>1</sup> See Swete, "Apostles' Creed," pp. 67, 68.

<sup>2</sup> Collected by J. J. Griesbach, "Opera Minusc.," ii., diss. xxv.

<sup>3</sup> Stokes, "Acts of the Apostles," i., pp. 48, 49; see also Hort, "The Way, the Truth, and the Life," p. 151; "Camb. Theol. Essays," p. 465.

<sup>4</sup> Acts iii. 21: "Though the Ascension had taken place, we have *δέε*, and not *ἔδεε*, because the necessity of the event is a permanent fact" (Hackett, "Com.," *in loc.*).

light was thrown on His Person (*cf.* John vi. 62, xvi. 28) that its dignity and glory were manifested.

The work of Christ is incomplete without Ascension. Whilst on earth He did not succeed in introducing "the happy kingdom of the future,"<sup>1</sup> the new dispensation of the Spirit which He had prophesied. "He anticipates," it has been said, "future acts of his work which are not simply symbolic of his utterances, but necessary to their interpretation. A future is always with Him: separate from the present in its conditions and gifts and in the nature of his agency, so separate as justly to be entitled to the name of a new 'dispensation.' The Ascension marks the transition. It has no substantial independence. It closes the public ministry; it opens the culmination of that ministry in the new age of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup> That the final Ascension should be a visible one was necessary for the Apostles. Had the manifestations of the Risen Lord continued indefinitely, serious difficulties would have occurred;<sup>3</sup> had they ceased without any indication that they would not be renewed, the Apostles would have been left in a state of uncertainty, and unfitted for carrying on the work which their Master had begun. After this Ascension we find them united for one common purpose.

### III.

From the time of Strauss downwards objection has been taken to the narrative of the Ascension on the ground that it savours of an exploded cosmogony and gives us a wrong idea of "heaven"; in the words of a recent writer, Professor Lovejoy, "This story (of the Resurrection) is inextricably involved with, and is unintelligible apart from, the complementary story of the Ascension, with its crude scene of levitation; and this, in turn, is meaningless without the scheme of cosmic topography that

<sup>1</sup> Schmiedel, "Protest. Monats.," 1906, pp. 257 ff.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Martin, in Hastings' "Dict. of Christ and the Gospels," vol. i., p. 125<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> This point is dealt with fully by Stokes, "Acts of the Apostles," vol. i., pp. 49 ff.; Latham, "Risen Master," pp. 378 ff.

places a heaven somewhere in space in a direct perpendicular to the earth's surface at the latitude and longitude of Bethany."<sup>1</sup> Apart from the consideration that the story itself does not bear out this interpretation, we must bear in mind that some great change occurred in our Lord's body at the Resurrection ; though the same body that hanged upon the Cross (Luke xxiv. 39, 41-43 ; John xx. 27) it was endowed with properties which made it independent of ordinary physical laws (Luke xxiv. 31, 36 ; John xx. 19). Physical sciences and psychology converge in repudiating the notion of the impossibility of the objective reality of the post-resurrection life of Jesus even though the phenomena it presents be beyond our comprehension ; and the opinion that the "spiritual body" (σῶμα πνευματικόν) is but a duplicate of the earthly body creates more difficulties than it solves.<sup>2</sup> There is no need to adopt the view, for which there is no Scriptural warrant, that during the forty days there was a gradual change going on in our Lord's body as a preparation for His Ascension, a view which is ultimately the result of prejudice against the teaching that He ascended more than once, and which contradicts the teaching of Scripture that resurrection is itself the completion of the new body (*cf.* 1 Cor. xv. 42-44). From the moment of resurrection the Saviour was clothed with the same body in which He ascended and now sitteth at the right hand of God.<sup>3</sup>

The Ascension has nothing to do with astronomy ; and as Mr. Griffith Jones has pointed out a right understanding of the account depends on that principle of accommodation which is the solvent of so many Scriptural difficulties. We venture to transcribe his weighty words : "A visible Ascension into the clouds unquestionably savours of the notion of a materialistic

<sup>1</sup> *Hibbert Journal*, 1908, p. 503 ; "Strauss, "Life of Jesus," § 142 ; J. M. Robertson, "Christianity and Mythology," pp. 384, 385 ; Streeter, "Foundations," p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> G. B. Stevens, "Theol. of the New Test.," c. xii. ; Ballard, "Miracles of Unbelief," p. 170 ; Schwartzkopff, "The Prophecies of Jesus Christ," pp. 92-95.

<sup>3</sup> Steinmeyer, "History of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord," p. 296.

heaven beyond the blue, and, so far, is entirely out of keeping with our present conception of the spirit-world. It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to imagine how the disciples could have been convinced of His final and irrevocable disappearance from the scenes of His earthly labours in any other way. Such an act of accommodation to the limited ideas of the time would at least be entirely in keeping with His gentle and sympathetic dealings with the mental limitations of His followers, and disposes of most of the objections raised against the story of the Ascension."<sup>1</sup>

The new school of mythology, represented by Winckler, Cheyne, and others, would throw discredit on the Ascension story<sup>2</sup> by adducing parallels from the stories of Enoch and Elijah, from Babylonian stories like that of Etana,<sup>3</sup> from Græco-Roman legends like those of Romulus and Herakles, and by endeavouring to show that from these pre-Christian myths the Christian representation of the Ascension grew. A detailed examination of these lies beyond the limits of this short article. All we can now say is that the Old Testament instances are not really parallels. In the case of Enoch, the Hebrew text of Gen. v. 24 simply says "he was not, for God took him," leaving the mode of his departure from the world uncertain; whilst in that of Elijah there is scarcely any analogy between the taking up of one by an external power and the going home of One by his own power; nor was his assumption an experience after that of death. As to the Babylonian and Græco-Roman myths, a study of these shows that the resemblances between them and the Ascension story of the Acts are outweighed by the profound differences,<sup>4</sup> and that they cannot have

<sup>1</sup> "The Ascent through Christ," p. 270. See also Latham, "Risen Master," pp. 386, 387; Thorburn, "Jesus the Christ," p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> "As a student of religion, I distinguish between the form of the truth that is believed and the very truth itself" (Cheyne, "Bible Problems," p. 121).

<sup>3</sup> See Jastrow, "Religion of Babylonia and Assyria," pp. 519 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See Fogtman's essay, "De Christi Jesu adscensu in cœlum," pp. 93 ff.

been interpolated into the Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> As Bishop Bernard says, "Christ's Ascension, as described in the Christian tradition, has no exact parallel in history or literature. This it is essential to keep in mind" (E.R.E. ii., p. 153). The upholders of the myth theory have not yet explained how and when these myths became part of the Ascension story. To Judaism they cannot be credited, for the Jews for a decade of centuries before the appearance of Christianity resisted the incorporation of such myths, and their resistance would be part and parcel of the tradition inherited by the Judæo-Christian community, whilst the sources of the early narratives in the Acts of the Apostles forbids us even to consider the infiltration of stories from purely Gentile sources.<sup>2</sup>

It may be well to mention here that any appeal to Rabbinical literature of the seers who entered Paradise and were granted revelations, to confirm a notion that ascension of the body to heaven was no strange thing to the Jews, is based on a misunderstanding of the Talmudical passage, Chagigah 14b, which runs: "Our Rabbis have taught that four men went up into Paradise (פֶּרֶדֶס, 'the Garden')—namely, Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher (*i.e.*, Elisha b. Abuyah), and R. Akiba."<sup>3</sup> The Tosaphoth do not take the passage literally, saying "it only appeared to them that they went up"; and it is certain, from the context in Chagigah, that the expression "entered Paradise" merely means that they engaged in the study of speculative philosophy, with disastrous results, as we learn, in the case of all but Akiba, who "went into Paradise in peace and came down in peace." There are some now who have done so!

<sup>1</sup> "A page of history, or a minute description of some present-day custom, could be proved mythical by setting against it several items of skilfully selected parallels from ancient history, from fable or folk-lore. The process is facilitated by the writer's liberty to describe his parallels in terms suggested by the comparison he has in mind" (Moulton, "Religions and Religion," p. 26; the Fernley Lecture for 1913).

<sup>2</sup> See Zenos in "Dict. of Christ and the Gospels," article "Myth."

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Bernard (E.R.E., ii. 151) is wrong in calling all four "Rabbis." Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma were not ordained. On Acher see Hershon's "Genesis," pp. 35 ff.



## IV.

The theological implications of the Ascension cannot be distinguished from those of the Resurrection, or from those of the sequel of both, the Session at the right hand of the Father;<sup>1</sup> and it is not without significance in this respect that the same historian should mark the Ascension at the close of the Day of Resurrection as the completion, so far as his history was concerned, of the earthly life of Jesus, and the Ascension forty days afterwards as inaugurating the preparation for the Day of Pentecost.

The Ascension was a true "exaltation" of Christ as Representative Man, and is conceived of as a reward of His humiliation in the elaborated rhetorical passage :

"Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."<sup>2</sup>

In this passage probably "the pre-temporal glory is thought of as the counterpart of His exaltation to sovereignty over the world" (*cf.* John xvii. 4, 5); and it thus serves to teach that the Ascension brought out what was inherent in the pre-existent Christ.<sup>3</sup> The "name" given to the glorified redeemer is that of "Lord," the name of Jehovah-God of the Old Testament. "Through the resurrection and exaltation, Jesus in a sense,

<sup>1</sup> On the connection of the Ascension with the Resurrection, see Milligan, "The Ascension of our Lord," pp. 12, 13. On the nature of the offices exercised by the exalted Saviour see the recent work of Principal Tait, "The Heavenly Session of our Lord." A discussion of the subject lies beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 6-11 (R.V.).      <sup>3</sup> See THE CHURCHMAN, JANUARY, 1915, p. 7.

according to Paul, *became* divine. He was thereby . . . constituted the Son of God in power.<sup>1</sup> But divinity in the proper sense, as distinct from *apotheosis*, cannot begin to be. The divine is eternal. Therefore He who was man, and thereafter was exalted to God's right hand, must have been with God before He came into the world."<sup>2</sup>

By ascension Jesus is set free from all human limitations, and can exercise a universal sway over His people in the undivided unity of His Person. So it was expedient that He should go away,<sup>3</sup> that the Living One might live in the hearts of His people, and not be a memory only. "The same Jesus," says Dr. Mackintosh, "inhabiting now a sphere in which His influence is universalized, continues to reveal the Father and to bestow a regenerating life through the instrumentality of His own personal impression. We can still be united to Him through faith. On this view, the divine working has been marked by continuity at each stage. Throughout, the living Person of Jesus is the ultimate force in Christianity. Its real content and power are dissipated if it be cut loose from an immediate relationship with Him, mere teaching, preserved in books or traditions, being substituted for the life-giving influence of a present Lord."<sup>4</sup>

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[The sixth and last article in this series, "Shall come again with glory," will appear in the June issue of THE CHURCHMAN, and will be contributed by the Rev. F. S. Guy Warman, D.D.]

<sup>1</sup> Rom. i. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, "Apologetics," p. 407.

<sup>3</sup> John xvi. 7.

<sup>4</sup> "The Person of Christ," p. 369.

