

## ART. VI.—MESSAGES FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

III.—*Hebrews iv.-vi.*

OUR study of the great Epistle takes another step, covering three short but pregnant chapters. So pregnant are they that it would be vain indeed to attempt to deal with them in one paper were we not mindful of our special point of view. We are pondering the Epistle not for all that it has to say, but for what it has to say of special moment and application for certain needs of our own time.

The outline of the portion before us must be accordingly traced. In detail it presents many questions of connexion and argument, for, particularly in chapter iv., the Apostle's thought takes occasionally parenthetical flights of large circuit. But in outline the progression may be traced without serious difficulty.

We have first the appeal to exercise the promptitude and decision of faith, in view of the magnificent promise of a Canaan of sacred rest made to the true Israel in Christ. Even to "seem" (iv. 1) to fail of this, even to seem to sink into a desert grave of unbelief while the rest of faith is waiting to be entered, is a thought to "fear." Great indeed are the promises; "living" and "energetic" is "the Word" which conveys them (iv. 12, if I am right, follows in thought upon iv. 2, leaving a long and deep parenthesis between).

That "Word" is piercing as a sword in its convictions, for it is the vehicle of His mind and His holiness "with whom is concerned our discourse" (iv. 13); while yet it is, on its other side, a "Gospel" indeed (iv. 2), the message of supreme good, so it be met with faith by the convicted soul. Yes, it is a message of a land of "rest," near and open, fairer far than the Canaan on which Caleb reported, and from which he and his fellows brought the great clusters of its golden vines. Passage after passage of the Old Scriptures (iv. 3-9) shows that *that* Canaan was no finality in the purpose of God; another "rest," another "day" of entrance and blessing, was intimated all along. Unbelief forfeited the true fruition of even the old Canaan for the old Israel. And now out of that evil has sprung the good of a more articulate promise of the new Canaan, the inheritance of rest in Christ, for the new Israel. But as then, so now, the promise must be met and realized by obedient faith. Despite the difficulties, in face of whatever may seem the Anakim of to-day, looking to Him who is immeasurably more than Moses, and who is the true and second Joshua ("Jesus," iv. 8), we must make haste to enter in

by the way of faith. We must "mingle the word with faith" (iv. 2), into one glorious issue of attained and abiding rest. We must lay our hearts soft and open (iv. 7) to the will of the Promiser. We must "be in earnest" to enter in (iv. 11).

Then, at iv. 14, the appeal takes us in beautiful order more directly to Him who is at once the Leader and the Promised Land. And again He stands before us as a "great High Priest." Our Moses, our Joshua, is also our more than Aaron, combining in Himself every possible qualification to be our guide and preserver as we enter in. He stands before us in all the alluring and endearing character of mingled majesty and mercy; a High Priest, a great High Priest, immeasurably great; He has "passed through the heavens" (iv. 14) to the holiest, to the throne, the celestial mercy-seat (iv. 16), "within the veil" (vi. 19); He is the SON (v. 5); He is the Priest-King, the true Melchizedek; He is all this for ever (vi. 20). But, on the other hand, He is the sinner's Friend, who has so identified Himself in His blessed Manhood with the sinner, taking our nature, that He is "able to feel along with our weaknesses" (iv. 15); "able to feel a sympathetic tolerance (*μετριοπαθεῖν*) towards the ignorant and the wandering" (v. 2); understanding well "what sore temptations mean, for He has felt the same"; yea, He has known what it is to "cry out mightily and shed tears" (v. 7) in face of a horror of death; to cast Himself as a genuine suppliant, in uttermost suffering, upon paternal kindness; to get to know by personal experience what submission means (*ἐμαθε τὴν ὑπακοήν*, v. 8); "not My will, but Thine be done."

Such is the "Leader of our faith," so great, so glorious, so perfect, so tender, so deep in fellowship with us. Shall we not follow Him into "the rest," though a "Jordan rolls between" and though there seem to be cities of giants even on the other side? Shall we not dare to follow HIM out of the desert of our "own works"?

Much, says the Apostle (v. 11, etc.) is to be said about Him; the theme is deep, it is inexhaustible; for He is God and Man, one Christ. And the Hebrews (and we) are not quick to learn the great lesson of His glory, and so to grow into the manhood of grace. But let us try; let us address ourselves to "bear onward (*φερώμεθα*) to perfection" (vi. 10), in our thought, our faith, and so in our experience. The great foundation facts must be for ever there—the initial acts or attitudes of repentance and of "faith towards God"; the abandonment of the service of sin, including the bondage of would-be self-salvation, and the simple turning God-ward of the soul which has come to despair of its own resources—

truths symbolized and sealed by the primal rites of baptism and blessing (vi. 2)—and then the great facts in prospect, resurrection and judgment. These, however, must be “left” (vi. 1), not in oblivion, but in progress, just as a building “leaves” the level of its (always necessary) foundation. We must “bear onward” and upward, into the upper air of the fulness of the truth of the glory of our Christ. We must seek “perfection,” the profound maturity of the Christian, by a maturer and yet maturer insight into Him. Awful is the spiritual risk of any other course. The soul content to stand still is in peril of a tremendous fall. To know about salvation at all, and not to seek to develop the knowledge towards “perfection,” is to expose one’s self to the terrible possibility of the fate reserved for those who have much light, but no love (vi. 4-9).<sup>1</sup> But this, by the grace of Góð, shall not be for the Apostle’s readers. They have shown living proofs of love already, practical and precious, for the blessed Name’s sake (vi. 10). Only, let them remember the spiritual law—the necessity of growth, of progress, of “bearing onward to perfection”; the tremendous risks of a subtle stagnation; the looking back, the pillar of salt.

In order that full blessing may thus be theirs, let them look for it in the only possible direction. Let them take again to their souls the mighty promise of eternal benediction (vi. 14), sealed and crowned with the Promiser’s gracious oath, in His own Name, binding Himself to fidelity under the bond of His own majesty (vi. 13). Ay, and then let them again “consider” HIM in whom promise and oath are embodied and vivified for ever; in whom rests—nay, in whom consists—our anchor of an eternal hope (vi. 19); Jesus, our Man of men, our High Priest of the everlasting order, now entered “within the veil,” into the place of the covenant and the glory, and “as Forerunner on our behalf” (vi. 20). To follow Him in there, in the “consideration” of faith and of worshipping love, is the secret, to the end, for “bearing onward to perfection.”

Our review of the passage is thus in some sort over. Confessedly it is an outline; but I do not think that any vital element in the matter has been overlooked. Much of the message we are seeking has been inevitably given us by the way; we may be content now to gather up and summarize the main result.

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<sup>1</sup> I make no attempt here to expound in detail the awful words of vi. 4-8. But I believe that their purport is fairly described in the sentence above in the text. Their true scriptural illustrations are to be sought in a Balaam and a Judas Iscariot.

The Hebrews, then, in their special circumstances of difficulty, are here in view, as everywhere else in the Epistle. Tempted to "fall away," to give up the "hope set before them," to relapse to legalism, to bondage, to the desert, to a famine of the soul, to barrenness and death—here they are dealt with, with a view to the more than prevention of the evil. And here, as ever, the remedy propounded is our Lord Jesus Christ, in His personal glory, in His majestic offices, in His unfathomable human sympathy, seen in perfect harmony of light with His eternal greatness.

The remedy is Christ, and a deeper, fuller, always maturing sight of Him. The urgent necessity is promptitude, and then progress, in respect of knowing Him.

At the risk of a charge of iteration and monotony, I reaffirm that here is the great antidote for the many kindred difficulties of our troubled time. From how many sides comes the strain! Sometimes from that of open naturalism; sometimes from that of the partial yet far-reaching "naturalism under a veil" which some recent teachings on "The Being of Christianity" may exemplify, and which largely underlies the extremer forms, certainly, of the new critique of Scripture; sometimes from the opposite quarter of ecclesiasticism, with its exaggeration and distortion of the principles of corporate life and sacramental operation. It would be idle to ignore the subtle *nuances* of difference between mind and mind, and the varying incidence in detail accordingly of the details of great truths. But it is not fair and true to say that, on the whole, the supreme personal glory of Christ, as presented direct to the human soul in its august and ineffable loveliness and life, in its infinite lovableness, is what alike the naturalistic and the merely ecclesiastic theories of religion tend to becloud. On the other side, accordingly, it is in the "consideration" of that glory, of that wonderful Christ, that we shall find the glow which can melt and overcome the beclouding. We must put ourselves continually in face of the revelation of it in the Word of God. We must let that revelation so sink into the heart as to do its self-verifying work there thoroughly. We must "bear onwards" evermore "unto perfection" in "knowing Him." So we shall stand, and live, and love, and labour.

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