

as he was of Christ, and Christ was of the Father, are in their measure and degree restoring in themselves that image of God after which they were created, and so helping others to see it clearly. So, as they feel and know and taste the nobleness that is possible in man—the patience, purity, meekness of the saints of God—men, women, children, penitent sinners, and perplexed and weary souls learn what no debate or definition could have taught them. “They love us; will not God forgive?” they ask, and, in asking, make answer to themselves. The method of which men speak with scorn as leading to poor unworthy thoughts of God, has proved to be that which has led them to the highest and the worthiest. The revelation of God in Christ has taught that a true anthropomorphism is the one safeguard against idolatry.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

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*THE FIRST CHAPTER  
OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.*

VERSES I AND 2.

THESE, and the two succeeding verses, the first four of the Epistle to the Hebrews, constitute a single sentence, skilfully and elegantly constructed. It is a stately tree of thought, remarkable alike for luxuriance of branch and for symmetry of form. It is the first of a whole forest of corresponding trees.

The usual formalities of superscription, salutation, and introduction are absent. We enter at once into a compact thicket of theological thought.

The Epistle is in this respect peculiar. It is still, indeed, an Epistle, and not a general Treatise or Dissertation. But it is penetrated, and at times overshadowed, by some of the obvious characteristics of a sustained oratorical Address.

Verse 1. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets* (ver. 2), *hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.*—The single word, that is rendered *at sundry times* (πολυμερῶς), is freely so rendered. It properly means *in numerous parts* or *parcels*,—which, however, were no doubt given *at sundry times*, so that the rendering in the Authorised Version, though imperfect, is legitimate. The idea is, that God did not, at once, open up the fulness of his mind, and unfold to view the treasures of his grace. His plan proceeded on the principle of ‘here a little’ and ‘there a little.’ His revelation was given ‘piecemeal.’ It came ‘bit by bit,’ as the fathers might be able to receive it.

The revelation was not only *in numerous parts* or *portions*, it was given *in divers manners* (πολυτρόπως). Our Translators received this rather cumbrous translation from the Geneva Version. Wycliffe’s rendering was more literal, *in many maners*. Tyndale’s was simpler, *many wayes*. The reference, as the Duke of Manchester correctly remarks, is not to the various modes in which God communicated his mind to the prophets, such as visions, voices (or, as David Dickson has it, ‘vive voices’), dreams, &c. It is to the various forms which the subject-matter of the communications was made to assume, as it passed on *through* the

prophets to the people at large. There were commandments. There were promises. There was history. There were exhortations, expostulations, invitations, warnings, pleadings, threatenings. There were predictions and types, parables and proverbs, psalms and songs. God spoke, as Cardinal Cajetan observes, "to the intellect, to the imagination, to the senses" (*intelligibiliter, imaginabiliter, sensibiliter*). He addressed at one time the principle of hope, at another the principle of gratitude, at another still the principle of competition and rivalry (*comp.* Rom. x. 19), then perhaps the principle of fear, or the nobler principle of conscience, and of the consciousness of a certain divine imperative speaking in authoritative tones within the conscience. Thus, 'in manifold fashion,' did God reveal his mind to *the fathers*.

This expression, *the fathers*, is just such a phrase as a Hebrew, writing to Hebrews, would be ready to employ. The possessive pronoun was not required. It might indeed have been employed—'our' *fathers*. But the more absolute representation, which shuts out all reference, indirect as well as direct, to other fathers, was quite a favourite phase of conception among the Jews. And it was adopted by the inspired writer, not in the spirit of a proud 'particularism,' but in the natural unconsciousness of a Hebrew, who had learned from his childhood to speak as a Hebrew. (*Comp.* Gal. ii. 15.) We are, of course, not to think exclusively of *the patriarch fathers* of the race. The reference is far wider, and very indefinite. It embraces the great body of the Hebrew ancestry throughout the whole cycle of time

during which they enjoyed the ministrations of the prophets. The beginning of that cycle is left indeterminate. So is its ending. It would be like fixing stakes where no stakes are needed or wanted, were we to assume that the writer is intentionally sweeping the whole definite period that extended from Abraham to the close of the ministry of John the Baptist.

*God 'spoke' to the fathers.* It is a fine absolute expression. God broke silence, and gave forth utterances to the fathers. There were "ears to hear," and therefore God "spoke." The expression, though absolute, is at the same time partial. It singles out one of the sense-avenues by means of which divine ideas can be conveyed to human minds. God, however, does not limit Himself to that. He speaks to the eye as well as to the ear. He speaks to all the senses; he speaks *through* them all. He reveals Himself at all the various inlets of the spirit's consciousness, whether they be found, as public gateways, in the outward periphery of the being, or as private doors in the secret places of the heart and conscience. Yet God did speak emphatically, and for purposes of mercy, by means of *words*, as well as by other symbols and hieroglyphs that readily supplied the place of uttered words.

God spoke thus *in time past*. This is Tyndale's translation of the original adverb (*πάλαι*). It was the reproduction of Luther's rendering (*vorzeiten*), and was a great improvement on Wycliffe's version, *sumtyme*; but it is not strong enough. Bengel's version is better, *long ago* (*vorlängst*). This is the rendering which the term receives in Matt. xi. 21.

It is rendered *of old* in Jude 4, and *a great while ago* in Luke x. 13. The Geneva Version hits the meaning exactly, *in the olde tyme*. The writer is looking across the long series of generations which had passed away since the rôle of the Old Testament seers had been closed.

—*by the prophets*. Literally, ‘*in*’ the *prophets*. Chrysostom says that the *in* means *through*. It does so substantially. But the phase of representation is modified. God’s speech was ‘*in*’ the *prophets* before it reached the people.

The term *prophets* does not exclusively denote *foretellers*. The foretelling element in the prophets’ communications was rather an ‘accident’ than the ‘essence’ of their prophesying. The preposition *pro* has more of a local than of a temporal import. The *prophets* were men who, when facing the people, stood as it were *before God*, and thus spoke *fore* Him and *for* Him. They spoke as they were inspired by Him, whether the matter of their communication had reference to the future, or to the present, or to the past. In the old dispensation,—which, from its peculiar circumstances, was emphatically a dispensation of hope,—the divine communications had naturally running through them, in very many instances, a vein of prediction. That prediction was therefore prophecy, but by no means the whole of prophecy. The Hebrew word for prophet is more generic than the Greek, and has nothing at all in its form that corresponds to *pro* or *fore*. It simply means *one who announces or reveals*.

Verse 2. *Hath in these last days spoken unto us*

*by his Son.* These words should have been left at the conclusion of the first verse. Robert Stephens, however, tore them off, and made of them the commencement of the second verse. Unhappily. And hence his illustrious son Henry, in his two editions of 1576 and 1587, relegates them to the first verse. So does Beza in all his editions with the exception of the first, that of 1556. The 'Received Text,' as given by the Elzevirs, followed in the wake of Beza. So did our British Mill (or rather Mills); as also Wetstein. So do Lachmann and Tischendorf, but not Griesbach.

*-hath spoken,* or, more literally, *spoke.* The verb is in the aorist tense. The act of God is represented as simply and indeterminately in the past. Its influence or effect on the present is not brought into view. God *did* speak.

*-in these last days.* A considerable expanse of time is referred to, demonstratively. Note the *these.* But the entire expression, as it lay before our Translators in 1611 and earlier, had been tinkered by the hand of some prosaic transcriber or annotator, who was startled by the form in which it stood, as it had come down from the apostolic age. The expression stood originally thus, *at the end of these days* (ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων). Such is the reading of *all* the uncial manuscripts, as also of *all* the critical editors from Bengel downward. It was the reading, too, of Robert Stephens in his first 'O Mirificam' edition, though in that only. The expression stretches the reference of the phrase *these days* far beyond what is suggested by the reading *these last days.* A long expanse of time

is referred to, coming down to the period when the inspired penman was engaged with his Epistle, and still running on in advance. It had been a cycle of multitudes of generations,—a cycle sweeping on through the world ever since sin had become rampant. It was '*the evil age,*' for the termination of which there was constant sighing-and-crying on the part of the holy. The Jewish Rabbis were accustomed to divide time into *the age that now is* and *the age that is to come*. When the inspired writer says *these days*, he refers to *the age that now is*. And when he particularises '*the end*' of *these days*, as the time when *God spoke by his Son*, he intimates that the significant event had occurred not long ago in the great cycle. There is an antithesis between the expression *spoke in the prophets long ago*, and the expression *spoke in the Son at the latter part of these days*. Perhaps there is more than this simple antithesis. Perhaps the writer intended to suggest that the beginning of the end had already come to pass.

—*spoke 'unto us.'* There is an antithesis here to the expression *spoke to the fathers*. The writer, as a Hebrew, realized that Jesus, in his personal ministry, spoke to the Hebrews. Not indeed *for* them alone, but with few exceptions *to* them. Hence the '*us.*' But was it true that God spoke, in Jesus, to the writer himself and to the Hebrews to whom he was writing? Not certainly to all of them, for in chapter ii. 3, it is said of the great salvation, "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, *and was confirmed 'unto us' by them that heard.*" But in the passage before us the writer merges him-

self, and those to whom he was writing, in the multitude of his countrymen who were, more or less determinately, the contemporaries of our Lord.

-*by his Son.* The pronoun, as is indicated by the italic type in our Bibles, has been supplied. There is not even the article in the original. And hence Wakefield translates 'by a son,' and Rotherham 'in a Son.' Unhappily however; for there is no indefinite article in the original. And yet we could not possibly, in our English idiom, say *in Son*. The area that is covered by the Greek article is by no means coextensive with the area which is covered by the English. And hence we should here either render the phrase, *in 'the' Son*, or use the pronoun, *in 'his' Son*. It is better to adopt the article. The idea is, *in Him who is emphatically Son*. The word was of itself so demonstratively conspicuous, that, in the Greek idiom, it could dispense with the demonstrative article. Others, it is true, besides Jesus, are *sons of God*. The poverty of human language could not, in the currency of common usage, afford to surrender the term to be the exclusive designation of the Only-begotten One. But, nevertheless, he is Son pre-eminently. He is partaker, not only in a moral point of view, but also physically, or metaphysically, of the Father's nature. He is "true God." And thus, in relation to the universe, he is the one Prince Royal. '*By*' or '*in* *this Son God spoke in the end of these days*. There is an intentional antithesis to the expression '*in* *the prophets*. God's speech was indeed '*in* *the prophets*; but yet more emphatically '*in* *the Son*. God's words were '*in* *both*. But as neither Son nor pro-



phets were mere mechanical sounding-boards or echoes, but receivers, reproducers, and interpreters, the outcome of words was very different in the two cases. In the prophets' utterances there were but exceedingly partial gleams, glances, aspects, and scattered fragments of revelation. In the Son there was unparalleled fulness, and consequent unity. God's word was in Him. More than that, He was Himself, in his very essence, *the Word of God*. All that He was, as well as all that He said and did, was Representation and Revelation of the mind and heart of the Father.

*—whom he appointed or constituted heir of all things.* *Heir and Lord.* See Gal. iv. 1. The expression *all things* is to be understood in its greatest amplitude,—all things in heaven, and all things on earth (see Matt. xxviii. 18),—the universe of things. Of this universe the Son is constituted *Heir and Lord*. Not simply *Lord*, but *Heir and therefore Lord*. His Lordship is, so to speak, the natural result of his Sonship. But the Sonship referred to is not the eternal, immanent, essential relationship that differentiates the divine personality of the Saviour from the divine personality of the Father. There must doubtless be such differentiation. But as the heirship here spoken of was—as the Greek Fathers particularly noticed—'appointed' or 'constituted,' so doubtless was the Sonship, in which the heirship was involved. It would seem that the Sonship referred to is that spoken of in Luke i. 35, "therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." It was a Sonship that *began*, but that nevertheless postulates the possession

of a nature that was *before all beginning*. It is the same Sonship, we conceive, that is spoken of in the seventh verse of the second Psalm,—“Thou art my Son, *this day have I begotten thee*.” The ‘day’ referred to is not naturally interpreted as the ‘to-day’ of eternity. It seems to be the day of the incarnation. (See Acts xiii. 33, where ‘again’ must be cancelled : *comp.* ver. 34.) The inheritance of the universe was granted by the Father to the incarnate Son, as a reward of “the travail of his soul.” It was a glorious heritage, exalting our stricken, smitten, wounded, bruised, but risen Lord “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. i. 21). Unlike some other inheritances, in which the intervenience of the proprietor’s death is needed in order to give scope for the heir’s full control and complete enjoyment, the inheritance of the universe can be controlled, and enjoyed to the full by the Son, although the Father live and reign for ever. Death is not essential to inheritance. It is but an accident attaching to some inheritances.

—*by whom also he made the worlds*. Or, according to the collocation of the words that is supported by the most ancient manuscripts, and accepted by the most modern editors, such as Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, *by whom he also made the worlds*. The Divine Father is represented as having done two things. (1) He constituted the incarnate Son his heir. (2) He *also*, and long before the incarnation, made the worlds by Him.

The inspired writer shifts with delightful ease his standpoint of observation, backward and forward. Now he assumes the fact of incarnation. Now he subsumes the reality of pre-existence. Here he steps backward, and running along the everlasting line of the divine nature of our Lord, antedates creation. Before Abraham was, Jesus is. Before Adam was, Jesus is. Before the worlds were, Jesus is. *The Father made the worlds through Him*, both the 'under' and the 'upper' world,—the whole universe; and hence He is fit to bear, without incongruity on the one hand, and without the least sense of oppression or weariness on the other, the entire weight and glory of the dignity that is involved in being Heir and Lord and Ruler of "all things."

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### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

ST. MATTHEW V—VII.

#### I. The Argument of the Sermon.

THE Sermon on the Mount is confessedly the master-piece of ethical wisdom. Nothing between the covers of the Bible is more admired, or so generally admired. Yet the Lord Jesus did not give the world his best wine in this cup, marvellous and precious though it be. The best thing in the Gospels is the gospel itself,—that manifestation of the righteousness and love of God in the person, the life, and the death of his Son by which He wins our love and makes us righteous. This disclosure of the redeeming love of God which proves the Father of all men to be "the Saviour of all men,"