

CHRIST AND THE ANGELS.

HEBREWS I.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews contains a threefold argument to shew the superiority of Christianity over the Old Dispensation, inasmuch as Christ is superior, (1) to the Angels, (2) to Moses, (3) to the Levitical priesthood. The first of these arguments occupies the first two Chapters of the Epistle, and will form the subject of the present series of papers.

Chapter i. Verses 1-4 form the general introduction to the Epistle, passing at Verse 4 to the special contrast between Christ and the Angels. The general sense of them may be thus paraphrased:—

After giving many partial revelations of Himself to the fathers in various ways by the prophets of old, God hath at the end of "these days" spoken to us by one who is his Son; whom He constituted heir of all things; by whom also He made the worlds: who, being the effulgence of his glory and the exact image or impress of his essential Being, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; becoming in this act as much superior to the angels as the name which He inherits is more distinguished than theirs.

In one or two points the Authorized Version has either missed a grammatical distinction, or followed a false reading of the Greek Text. To the former head belong, in Verse 1, *God who spake* instead of *having spoken* scil. *of old: at sundry times* instead of *in many parts, in many utterances of an incomplete kind*. In Verse 2, the reading *in these last days* is false. The Septuagint renders the same Hebrew phrase sometimes *in the last days*, sometimes *at the end of the days*. The Apostle selects the second form, and makes it more precise by the insertion of *these*, in accordance with the Jewish distinction between *this world* (hā'ōlām hazzèh) and the

world to come (hā'ólām habbá). The sense therefore is that Christ has appeared at the close of the course of the present world. So Chapter ix. 26; "he hath appeared *at the close of the worlds.*" The present physical world is mutable and must perish' (Chap. i. 10-12). Those things which have been made are moveable and pass away (Chap. xii. 27). Only God's kingdom which cannot be moved (Chap. xii. 28), the "future city" of the world to come, is eternal (Chap. xiii. 14). The close of this mutable course of things is betokened by the appearance of Christ, and accomplished in the second coming which the Apostle looks on as near (Chap. x. 37), and even as visibly approaching (Chap. x. 25). But the right of the Apostle to speak of the old world as practically at an end with the manifestation of Christ does not depend on the length of time still to elapse before the second coming. The powers of the world to come are already active in Christendom (Chap. vi. 5). And so what Chapter viii. Verse 13 says of the old and new Dispensations is plainly applicable here also. Where the new is already introduced, the old must be viewed as worn out and visibly approaching its end, even though to the eye of sense it has still thousands of years to run. From the last clause but one of Verse 3 in the Authorized Version omit *by himself* and *our*.

What is the conception of Christ's person here set forth? What these Verses say of Him has plainly a twofold connection—metaphysical and historical; and it has been found to be not quite easy to separate what is metaphysical, that is, what belongs to Christ already in his preexistence, from what pertains to Him only as historically manifested and glorified.

Two points are quite clear:

1. He attains his position of superiority to the angels in taking his seat at the right hand of God. This appears from the tenses (aorist with aorist participle), but also from Verse 6, where it is at his second coming that the angels worship Him; and from the contrast with the temporary subordination of Jesus to the angels which we shall find drawn out in Chapter ii. In this connection it is plain that the adjective *κρείττων* (Authorized Version *better*) is used

not of natural but of official superiority. (Chap. vii. 7.) Our Lord in his exaltation is invested with a dignity superior to that of the angels, and corresponding to the superior dignity of the name of Son. Again, superiority of dignity and function, so far as it falls within the cognisance of the Christian thinker, must have relation to the government of mankind and the plan of salvation. The Apostle's point is that, simultaneously with his exaltation, Jesus assumes a place in the order and hierarchy of salvation superior to that of the angels. The practical importance as well as the demonstration of this thesis will appear by and by.

2. On the other hand Christ's *Sonship* does not date from his exaltation. It was as *Son* that He suffered and spake on earth (Chaps. v. 8, i. 2). But, again, He was *Son* even as preexistent. It was through the Son that God created the worlds; for it is arbitrary to say, with Hofmann, that God hath spoken to us by a son and heir who, even before He became a son at his incarnation, existed and was God's instrument in creation. And it is not said that He inherited the name of Son at his exaltation, but only that He received an exaltation conformable to the superiority of the name which He inherits. The Sonship is doubtless as eternal as his person (Chap. vii. 3).

Which now of the other predicates of the Son in this passage belong to his eternal preexistence, and which only to his historical exaltation? It is a description of the eternal nature of the Son to say that He is the effulgence or bright radiance of the Father's glory, and the impress, the facsimile of his hypostatic being. The figure is closely parallel to the language of the Alexandrian Book of Wisdom (Chap. vii. 25 seqq.) in speaking of the Divine Wisdom. But that Wisdom is an impersonal principle which, "being one, is all powerful; and, remaining ever in itself, renews all things; and, entering into holy souls from generation to generation, produces friends of God and prophets."

Here, on the contrary, we have a personal "light of light," a Son who is the image of the invisible God (Col. i. 15). The Apostle gives no formal doctrine of eternal generation; and the same expressions of effulgence and impress are applied by Philo to the soul of man on the ground of Genesis i. 26, ii. 7; yet certainly the idea of a bright radiance streaming forth from God's glory points in the direction of the doctrine of an eternal generation; of a generation, that is, not before time but in the eternal now. The same idea of the eternal now is found by Philo in Psalm ii. 7, and was probably in the Apostle's mind in Verse 5. Once more, it is true of the Son, apart from the incarnation, that his mighty word upholds all things. Not only the creation, but the continuance, of the world is his work. The almighty word, or productive energy of Deity, operates only through Him, is his word in the upholding as well as in the creation of the universe (Col. i. 17).

But now comes a question much vexed by interpreters. When was the Son constituted heir of all things? Is this coincident with his exaltation? or does universal heirship belong to the Son from all eternity? The real point involved in this tangled question may be better put in another way. Is the universal heirship of Christ a metaphysical prerogative? or is it dispensational, having a relation to his work of redemption? The latter seems the correct view. It is impossible to separate the universal heirship and dominion of the Son from his sitting at the right hand of the heavenly Majesty, which is the seat of dominion (Chaps. i. 13, x. 12, 13, xii. 2). Again, in the Gospel, the heirship of the Son, as set forth in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, is plainly dispensational, Lordship over the vineyard of God, which is a familiar Old Testament image for Israel. So, too, in Romans viii. 17 the heirship of Christ is associated with the

heirship of believers. There is no sufficient ground for dividing the thought of our Apostle from these analogies; and the expression "heir of all things" is not inconsistent with the dispensational reference; for in Ephesians i. 20-22 it appears, in like manner, as a prerogative of Christ's resurrection glory at the right hand of God, that He is head over all things to the church.

And now comes the last question: What is conferred on Christ at his exaltation which He had not before? The old fathers say that what He always possessed in his Divine nature is now conferred on his human nature also. But of this there is no trace in the text. Rather the essential place of the Son, the Logos, in relation to the works of God's omnipotence, is not identical with the place of the Son as the head of the moral creation. He becomes superior to the angels when He assumes a dispensational relation to man—and, through man, the head of creation, a relation to the whole universe—superseding them. There is nothing added to the intrinsic superiority of his being; but He occupies towards us a position as God's vicegerent higher than the angels ever held. The whole argument turns not on personal dignity, but on dignity of function in the administration of the economy of salvation.

The thesis of Verse 4 is the starting point of Chapter ii. The intervening Verses consist of argument and illustration drawn from the Old Testament, to confirm what has been already said. Observe in these Verses what is taken for granted, and what is supposed to require arguing out.

No words are wasted in proving that Christ is spoken of, not only in Psalm ii. (cited in Verse 5) and Psalm xlv. (cited in Verses 8, 9), but also in the passages cited in Verse 6 and Verses 10-12. The original of Verse 6 is not Psalm xcvi. 7, where there is no *καὶ*, but the Septuagint of Deuteronomy xxxii. 43. The passage speaks of the great judgment in which God avenges his people, and other words from it are

quoted by our writer in speaking of God's judgment at Chapter x. Verse 30. Now, that all judgment is committed to the Son was the express teaching of Jesus; and so our author has no difficulty in assuming that his readers will follow him in taking the theophany of Deuteronomy to mean the second appearing of Christ (Chap. ix. 28), when God "again introduces the firstborn into the world of man."¹ Clearly too it is assumed that the title *firstborn* will occasion no difficulty. The use of this expression for the Messiah comes from Psalm lxxxix. 27, where the context refers to the unending duration and supremacy of the kingdom of God's anointed One, the very ideas which are in our author's mind and which he develops in the subsequent citations from Psalms xlv., cii.

The citation from Psalm cii. is again assumed to be without dispute Messianic (Verses 10-12). This can only be done in virtue of the doctrine that creation is the work of the preexistent Christ; so that we must conclude this doctrine to have been already familiar to the readers addressed, as we find it expressly taught by Paul (1 Cor. viii. 6; Col. i. 16). It was in fact a doctrine which would find the more ready assent because Jewish theology, attaching itself to Old Testament ideas, had already in part anticipated it. What is said of the preexistent Wisdom in Proverbs viii. was developed in the Alexandrian schools, and influenced Philo's doctrine of the Logos as the eldest Son of God, the organ of creation. But among the Jews in general the preexistent Wisdom is rather the Law created before the creation of the world; and it is very possible that Paul derived the figure of the law as a "pedagogue" from the Jewish exegesis which in Proverbs viii. 30 borrows this Greek word as the rendering of *amôn* (A.V. *one brought up with him*). The doctrine of the preexistent Messiah in

¹ The doctrine of the Messiah as judge was known to Jewish theology. He judges the angels (B. Enoch lv. 4, lxi. 8) and men (Fourth Ezra xiii. 87).

Hebrew theology has a different source, and comes from Daniel vii., where the Messiah is pictured descending in clouds of heaven. In Semitic thought metaphysical ideas are of necessity expressed by metaphor; and so in Jewish theology to say that a thing exists in heaven means that it is ideal and eternal. Accordingly, the idea of the Messiah who descends from heaven is worked out in further development in the later Jewish books. The book of Enoch says (Chap. xlvi.) that He was chosen and hidden before God before the world was created, and will be before Him to all eternity. And, in like manner, the fourth book of Ezra speaks of God's Son [or Servant] the Messiah as hidden in a secret place until the time of his revealing shall come (Chap. xiii. 26, 52). When such conceptions as these were combined with the Old Testament doctrine of the creative Word of God, eternal in the heavens (Psalms xxxiii. 6, cxix. 89), it was not difficult to pass onward to the New Testament doctrine of creation by the preexistent Christ. The Apostle accordingly does not find it necessary to bring forward arguments to prove that doctrine; but, on the other hand, he takes pains to prove at length that the Son is superior in name and office to the Angels: and therefore—as the argument proceeds in Chapter ii.—that the dispensation which He administers supersedes that Old Testament economy which rested, as the Jews boasted, on angelic mediation. To us this may seem much more obvious than the points which are taken for granted as undisputed; but it clearly was not so to the first readers.

We must remember that our Lord Himself never gave a theoretical explanation of the Divine prerogative He claims. The doctrine of the person of Christ was gradually worked out, and such hints for it as were afforded by pre-Christian speculation were not always helpful. Certainly the superiority of the Messiah to the angels was a point distinctly suggested in Daniel vii., and developed in that part of the

Jewish theology which had the highest view of the person of the Messiah (Book of Enoch xl. 5, lv. 4, lxi. 8). But on the other hand the Logos of Alexandrian speculation is not sharply marked off from the plurality of Logoi, whose unity He is; and the latter again are identified with the angels by Philo, who sometimes calls the Logos Himself angel or archangel. Again, it was a common Jewish opinion, expressed in the Palestinian Targum, that the angels were associated with God in the creation of man; the words *Let us make man* being held to be addressed to them. And, in general, the lofty predicates of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament disposed men to form a very high estimate of the functions and dignity of the angels. The Epistle to the Colossians shews us angel-worship as a temptation offered to the church, apparently by Jewish Christians of an Essene type. And we know that one form of Gnostic Docetism was characterized by the doctrine that Christ was an angel.

We have no reason to assume that any definite heresy of a similar kind had found support among the first readers of our Epistle. But at least their views were not so clear as to render it superfluous to insist on the Scripture proof of the inferiority of the angels to Christ. It is therefore argued (1) that no angels could be addressed in the words of Psalm ii. (Verse 7): (2) that the subordination of the angels to Christ at his second coming is predicted in Scripture (Verse 6). Then, to give a still more clear and convincing proof of the superiority of Christ, the angels are characterized in Old Testament language. It must be remembered that the contrast of the physical and the spiritual, the mutable and the eternal, the earthly and the heavenly, runs through the whole Epistle, and dominates the whole contrast of Dispensations. The Old Testament allows this contrast to be applied to the angels and Christ. In the later parts of the Old Testament the angels appear in

the closest association with physical powers of the universe. Nay, in Psalm civ. 4 they are actually identified with winds (not as A.V. *spirits*) and flaming fire—the very form of their existence is unstable, in correspondence with the changing necessities of their ministrations. This connection between the angels and cosmical powers must probably be taken as giving additional point to the subsequent citation from Psalm cii. In their appearance and ministerial functions the angels are connected with created things, which pass away; whereas the eternal sovereignty of Christ is unchangeable as the person of Him who is superior to all these mutations, inasmuch as the mutable things of creation are his own handiwork. Finally, in Verses 13, 14 we have a fresh statement of the contrast. While the Son sits at God's right hand in kingly dignity, the angels are continually sent forth (mark the present participle) on ministerial functions; yea, in the service of the heirs of salvation, who, therefore, are no longer in any sense subject to them and their dispensation.

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THE CORINTHIAN SADDUCEES.

1 CORINTHIANS XV.

A VERY good canon for the exposition of the argumentative parts of Holy Scripture is, Never to be satisfied until we ourselves feel the force of the sacred writer's reasoning, that is, until he compels us, if we accept his premises, to accept also his conclusions. For, unless the arguments of the Bible convince us as arguments, we cannot be sure that we understand the sense they were designed to convey.

To feel the logical force of the arguments in St. Paul's famous Chapter on the resurrection is by no means easy.