

with the birth of the child, or by some incident in his after history which impressed itself upon the memory of his contemporaries; and that this latter type of name predominates in the earlier Chapters. There are doubtless scores of other such names scattered over the pages of the book, especially in the genealogies, which are as pregnant with meaning as those which have been considered. But in the present state of our knowledge, or rather ignorance, both of the history of the men, and in many instances of those primitive languages in which the elements of the names should be sought, we must be content to leave them unexplained, and to acquiesce at least for the time in the confession that, while we believe that there is much interesting ancient history underlying those apparently dry lists of names, yet it cannot be reached by us because we have lost the key.

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*SCRIPTURE STUDIES OF THE HEAVENLY
STATE.*

V. THE DESIRE OF THE ANGELS.

(1 *Peter* i. 12.)

IN our last paper we considered in its first and initial stage the nature of that law which determines the blessedness of heaven. As yet we have only looked at this law as it was seen in the life of the Christian Founder; in other words, we have begun with the Head of the body. But, if this be a true principle, it must, like all other principles, be proved by an induction of particulars. We cannot rest with the Head of the body; we must descend to the members also. We must try to see whether the law which is

true at the summit holds good also at the base, and whether that which constitutes the joy of the Lord is made to constitute also the joy of those who follow Him. We proceed, therefore, to the second stage of being, the stage which the Bible describes as intermediate between the Divine and the human—the life of the angels. We pass by for the present all speculative questions, all inquiries into the origin, the development, or the accuracy of the belief in such intermediate spirits; we confine ourselves solely to the question, What is the testimony of Scripture regarding the source of angelic joy? The writer to the Hebrews distinctly states that the angels are not of the race of Adam.¹ In that fact lies the importance of the present enquiry. We want to know whether the special blessedness we have ascribed to the Son of Man was merely the result of his humanity, or whether it had its root in his absolute Divine nature. If He found his joy in love, was it only because He was a man? or was it also because love is the essence of the heavenly life? To answer that question we must call in an order of intelligences other than the human. If the angels, whose nature the Son of Man did not bear, should yet be found to derive their joy from the same source, and to drink of the river of his delight, we shall have reached one great step to the conclusion that the Cross has its root in heaven.

“*Which things the angels desire to look into*”: such are the startling and seemingly irrelevant words in which St. Peter sums up his view of the work of Old Testament prophecy. That celestial spirits, in a state of absolute perfection, should desire anything at all, is a paradox to the popular Christian consciousness. Yet the main difficulty of the passage does not lie here. When we remember that the ideal of the Christian rest on earth is not the annihilation but the stimulation of the heart, we shall not be

¹ Heb. ii. 16.

disposed to think that the perfection of the heavenly state demands the extinction of desire. What really excites our astonishment is the sudden, and to all appearance abrupt transition, from the human to the superhuman. We use the last word advisedly. If it had been a transition from the human to the Divine, there would have been no marvel. To say, as the Hebrew poet says, that the eye of the Lord beholdeth the children of men, does not strike us as a paradox; for the Infinite must include the finite. But that a race of beings who are not infinite, and who at the same time are not human, should be represented as peering with wistful gaze into the meaning of certain Jewish prophecies—this seems strange indeed. Have we not here an arbitrary rather than a natural selection? Why should the angels look into these more than into other things? Why should the recognition of angels be a matter of more appropriate comment than the recognition of the just made perfect, or of God the Father of all?

Now to arrive at a solution of this problem we must in the meantime divert our eyes from the angels altogether. We must try to fix our gaze upon the object of their contemplation—the things into which they desire to look. It will be found, we think, that a great part of our perplexity concerning this passage arises not from any mystery that overhangs the nature of angels, but from our misconception of that human work which is said to have attracted their attention.

Let us observe, then, first of all, that the subject of this verse is not the angels, but the prophets; the angels are only mentioned incidentally, and by an association of ideas—an association which it is the business of the expositor to discover. St. Peter's immediate gaze is resting solely on the prophets of the Old Testament; it is the secret of their work that *he* desires to look into. But wherein to the mind of St. Peter lies the secret of their work? Not in

their tropes and figures ; not in their types and symbols ; not in their power to foretell events. To him the main-spring of their greatness is behind all these things ; it lies in "the Spirit of Christ which was in them," *i.e.* their spirit of unselfishness. In the very passage under consideration he speaks of them thus : "Unto whom it was revealed that, *not unto themselves, but unto us* they did minister the things which are now reported unto you." The picture is a striking one. We are made to see before us a company of men preaching with lofty eloquence as on the top of a mountain, to no other audience than the winds of heaven, and with no other hope than the chance that the winds of heaven may waft their message to posterity. They are experiencing the fate which genius in every age has more or less to experience—the burden of work in solitude. They are alone, misunderstood, unbefriended. Their cry is, Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ? They are proclaiming a kind of power which the world not only cannot see, but which it habitually connects with weakness. An arm of the Lord which displays itself in sowing a seed that grows up as a tender plant, is not likely to attract the admiration of a sensuous multitude. And so the prophets, like Him they prefigured, tread the winepress alone. Of their contemporaries there is none with them—not even the priests and the Levites, the religious men of the day. *They* have nothing to reap from anything that they sow. They have not even the hope that they themselves will enjoy the unselfish pleasure of seeing the work of the Lord prospering in their hands. They see a light which others cannot see and cannot be made to see, and they are conscious of their fate ; their mission is to bear a lamp whose warning and guiding rays no man will heed.

Hence they were ministering spirits to a future age : "not unto themselves, but unto *us*." They had no hope

of personal recognition, no prospect of personal usefulness ; but they cherished a firm and sure belief that, whatever might befall them individually, their work would not die. A generation yet unborn would be the holier and happier because *they* had lived and laboured. They would leave tracks in the snow that would lead future wanderers home ; that was their hope, that the object of their lives. And if we go on to ask what it was that made these men so unselfish, St. Peter himself suggests the answer. He says (verse 11) that they were inspired by their own message ; they were helped to minister by the very things which they ministered. They foretold "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow ;" but they foretold these things "by the Spirit of Christ which was in them." The secret of their power to minister was the message which they carried in their hearts.

Here, then, is the first step in our process of exegesis ; we have found the thought from which the Apostle started. That thought is, that the prophets are the ministering spirits of the Old Testament. But in the very statement of this thought it was inevitable that his mind should touch a new link of association. The prophets of the Old Testament were the ministering spirits of God on earth ; but there was another class of ministering spirits spoken of in the Old Testament—the angels, the emissaries of God in heaven : "Who maketh his angels winds, his ministers a flaming fire." It was to them that, in the great void left by the isolated God of Judaism, men looked for mediation. The Father of Spirits was far off, separated from his creatures by all the breadth of an intellectual and a moral infinitude ; no man as man could see his face and live. But, though He could not communicate *Himself*, He could communicate his *will*. He had messengers at his command who could bear tidings of Him through the void, until they reached the ears of his creatures. The

summit of the ladder which binds earth and sky has never been touched, has never been seen by any man; but between the summit and the base there is interposed a myriad of intelligences, each rising higher in the scale, and each engaged in the service of man. The writer to the Hebrews only expressed the belief of his countrymen when he said: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Here, then, in the view of St. Peter, are two classes of ministers to the wants of man—the one of earth, the other of heaven. But it is quite clear to his mind that at the outset the advantage lies with the earthly helpers; the prophets are by nature more helpful to man than the angels. And the reason is plain; the prophets were human, the angels superhuman. The prophets, however distant in time they may have been from the men to whom they ministered, were yet allied to them by the affinity of a common nature; they were speaking to their fellows, and therefore they had a reasonable prospect of success. But the angels were divided from the beings to whom they ministered by a far wider gulf than that of time; they were separated from them by a gulf of nature. The angels were of one race, the men to whom they were sent were of another. There was no common ground on which the human and the superhuman could meet. A spatial distance could be bridged by travel, a temporal distance might be spanned by a voice that could reach the universal intuitions of the heart; but a distance of *nature*, a difference in the order of intelligence—this was a chasm which might well seem too wide and deep to be crossed.

Now this is precisely the thought which St. Peter attributes to the angels themselves. They have received a commission to be God's ministers to the needs of men. They have a difficulty in obeying the command, because they are higher in the order of intelligence than the race

to whom they are sent. Searching for an example and illustration of the work they are called to do, their eye lights on the ministering spirits of this world—the prophets of the Old Testament. They see these men unselfish in the midst of selfishness, labouring for an end they themselves can never hope to witness. And the thought rises in their mind: Is not our example here? Would it not be worth while to study these men, “to bend down and look into” the secret of their power? If the prophets by the inspiration of their own message were able, in the face of surrounding obloquy, to minister to the coming race of man, were not the details of that message worth discovering and considering by those from whom the race of man had been taught to expect succour: “He shall give his angels charge over thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up.”

We have thus reached the central idea of this remarkable passage. Two classes are placed over against one another—the human prophets and the superhuman angels. One and the selfsame task has been committed to both; the task of ministering to the wants of man. Yet the task, though the same, is not equally easy to them. To the prophets it is easier than to the angels; and for this reason that the prophets are human. The angels have to *bend down* in order to compass their work. They have not in them the seed of Abraham, and therefore their language is naturally foreign to the human heart. They must learn from “the heirs of salvation” how they are to minister to the heirs of salvation. This is what they wish to learn. They put themselves in a difficult attitude; they positively *stoop* toward the earth in the intensity of their eagerness to catch some tidings of the great secret which enabled the prophets to serve mankind.

If this view of the passage be accepted, we reach a result of some exegetical value. For there are in the

New Testament one or two other passages relating to the angels which have carried with them an air of obscurity. But if we look at these passages in the light of St. Peter's idea, we shall find on the one hand that much of their obscurity has vanished, and on the other that what we call St. Peter's idea was in reality a common possession of the whole Christian Church. Let us begin with a verse which has been a perpetual puzzle to the commentator, not from any difficulty of grammatical structure, but from the sheer inability to find a meaning in the words—1 Corinthians xi. 10. St. Paul there says: "*For this cause ought a woman to have power on her head because of the angels.*" By "power on her head" he means of course a *veil*, but what this has to do with the angels is not at once apparent. If, however, we come to the words with the thought of St. Peter in our minds, we shall get from them a very distinct meaning. St. Paul says that the glory of a Christian woman lies not in her self-assertion, but in her self-surrender; her power is her veil. That which makes her empire is not her rule, but her power to minister to the wants of others. This power is symbolized in her veil. The veil, which to the eye of man in Eastern lands is a mark of her subordination, is to the eye of the angels a mark of her supremacy. It is into this veil that the angels desire to look, for it is within this veil they will find the secret of their own mission. The heart of a Christian woman is a subject for the study of angels, because it reveals that which of all others the angels desire to learn—the highest mode of human ministration. It reveals in its most subtle and effective form the power of the human heart to *strengthen* the human heart. It discloses the method by which man secures the largest influence over man, power to aid and raise his fellows most effectually. Paradoxically enough, this power is secured by a veiling of power, a sinking of self, a surrender

of empire. But it is just its paradoxical nature that makes it a fit subject for study. The power of the veil—this is the human paradox, this the human mystery which in the view alike of St. Paul and of St. Peter, “the angels desire to look into.”

The second passage we have to consider in this connexion is Matthew xviii. 10, where we read: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that their angels in heaven do always behold the face of their Father in heaven.” In what sense are we to understand these words? Shall we say that the “angels” of little children mean their disembodied spirits? On the ears of the first disciples such a use of the word would have fallen without meaning. Shall we say, our Lord meant to teach that the guardian angels of little children are specially favoured beings? No doubt He did; but the question is, Why? on what ground should the guardian angels of children see more of the face of God than the guardian angels of men? Unless we have a distinct impression on this subject, it is the angels and not the children, who are the real objects of our eulogy—the beings not to be despised. But if we look at our Lord’s words through the thought of St. Peter there will flash on them a new light. Christ was speaking to those who despised the spirit of childhood. They despised it because it seemed to want power. It was unconscious of itself, and therefore it had no beauty to men whose highest ideal of greatness was the successful pursuit of individual interest. To these men Christ said in effect: That which you despise is greater than you. It is greater by reason of that which in your eyes makes it less—the absence of self-consciousness. You look *down* upon this spirit, but there is a class of beings higher than you who desire to look *into* it. The angels of God themselves are students of the child-life. It is in the study of childhood they find their deepest moments of

contemplation and their grandest powers of development, for it is in the study of childhood that they see the face of God. Here, in its full significance, is unfolded to their view the nature of that purpose for which the Heavenly Father called them into being. Here, in simple outlines, they can read their mission and their destiny. They stand face to face with the will of God, with the heart of God. They see the human agency which is to establish the kingdom of heaven throughout the universe, and they are not ashamed to own themselves the students of this elect humanity. They find in the face of childhood a mirror in which they behold a more glorious countenance still—the unveiled face of the Heavenly Father.

The last passage to which we shall here direct attention is 1 Timothy iii. 16. There, amongst the catalogue of Christ's earthly glories, is this: He was "seen of angels." The words are evidently part of some very ancient liturgy in which a confession of the primitive Christian faith is formulated, and hence they are fraught with a special interest. Yet it must be confessed that, in the connexion in which they occur, they have at first sound a somewhat prosaic ring. They form the only statement regarding Christ which seems inadequate to his greatness. To say that He was "manifest in the flesh;" that He was "justified in the Spirit;" that He was "preached to the Gentiles," "believed on in the world," and "received up into glory;" all this is consistent with the idea of his Divine majesty. But to be told that in addition to these things, He was "seen of angels," appears very like an anticlimax. That He who was actually "received up into glory" should have been deemed worthy to have been "seen of angels," has so much the character of a truism that one wonders it should have been included in the roll of his triumphs.

Yet a little reflection will make it clear that the prosaic

character of the passage lies purely in our mode of interpretation. We read the words as if they meant that being seen by the angels was an honour to Jesus; if we take St. Peter's view, they mean that the sight of Jesus was a blessing to the angels. The "angels" in this clause stand in the same relation to Christ as the "Gentiles" do in the next; they are both *preached unto*. The angels had a vision of the Son of Man—a vision of that very mystery which above all others they desired to look into. They found in the sight of Him a new avenue for exploring the secret of ministration to the wants of man. They were helped to come out from their own nature into human nature. Christ was to them the true ladder of Jacob; they descended by Him. They found in Him a perfect vision of that child-life which to them was a revelation of the face of God. They saw in Him that veil of self-forgetfulness which added the symbol of womanhood to the qualities of the highest manhood. They beheld in Him an unveiling of that power which had enabled the prophets of the Old Testament to minister not to themselves, but unto others the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

To conclude: the angels of the Old and New Testaments have a mission of special unselfishness. In an almost literal sense it is the law of their life to *lose* their life. They can only fulfil their destiny by stooping beneath themselves. They can only reach the design of their being by passing into a nature intellectually inferior to their own. It is this, and not any mystical attribute, that has made the angel-life to every age the type and symbol of unselfishness. It is this thought of an angelic love transcending the limits of the angelic sphere, which has prompted our Gospels to say of beatified human souls, "They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God." When our Lord uttered these words He was claiming for the heavenly state not less love than that of earth, but more.

He desiderated in the present life a love purely unselfish. Marriage, its most ideal type, was, even in its most ideal form, but the entrance into communion, of minds already kindred. Our Lord discerned a yet higher possibility for man—the entrance into communion with minds as yet not kindred. He felt that however high it was to love *oneself* in another, it was not yet the topmost round. The highest love which a human soul could reach was the power to come out of self, the power to put itself into the place of another just where the nature of that other was most unlike its own. To realize the conditions of others, to enter by thought into the temptations of others: this was the secret of the Divine charity which was destined to abide for ever, for this is the life of those celestial spirits, who, from the height of a loftier platform, desire to look into the weakness of man.

GEORGE MATHESON.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE APOCALYPSE.

IV. THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH.

AN important point connected with the representation given us of the Church of Christ in the Apocalypse has reference to the enquiry, whether throughout the book the Church as a whole is viewed as faithful to her Lord, or whether she is to be regarded as consisting of two parts, one only of which continues stedfast to the end, while the other yields to the temptations of the world, and is at length visited by divine judgment in its severest form. The question is in its essence similar to that which has been so often and so eagerly discussed, whether the New Testament draws a distinction between a *visible* and an