

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

III. CHRIST AND THE ANGELS (CHAP. I. 5-14; II. 1-4).

A MODERN interpreter, if he were to take his readers into his confidence, would confess that he would gladly pass over this section about angels. It is an irksome task to be obliged to consider gravely a proof that Christ is greater than angels; the thing to be proved is so much a matter of course. The angels are for us pretty much a dead theological category. Everywhere in the Jewish world, they are nowhere, or next to nowhere, in ours. Never was a truer word written than that not to angels was "the world to come" put in subjection. They have practically disappeared from the Christian world in fact and in thought. The "nature" angels, by whose agency, according to the Jewish theory of the universe, the phenomena of nature were produced, have been replaced in our scientific era by physical forces. The angels of Providence, though not so entirely discarded, are now rare and strange visitants.

The subject, I think, was a weariness to the writer also. A Jew, and acquainted with Jewish opinion, and obliged to adjust his argument to it, he was tired of the angelic *régime*. Too much had been made of it in popular opinion and in rabbinical teaching. He is by no means to be supposed to be in sympathy with either. His state of mind was similar to that of all reformers living at periods of transition, who have lost interest in the traditional, the old, and the decadent, and are eagerly, enthusiastically open to the influences of the new time. He is as little in sympathy

with angelology as with leviticalism ; both for him belong to the old world of Judaism which is ready to vanish away. This mood of his is what we can cordially sympathise with, and what gives us heart to go through with an otherwise distasteful task.

While feeling an argument in proof of Christ's superiority to angels superfluous, we moderns can still appreciate in some measure the religious grandeur of the argument actually adduced in this passage. Suppose for the moment all critical and exegetical difficulties connected with this variegated mosaic composite of Old Testament texts, so beautiful from the picturesque point of view, removed, how impressive the sublime contrast drawn ! how admirably it serves the purpose of making the angels dwindle into insignificance in presence of Christ ! He, the first-born Son of God, Himself Divine, performing creative works, everlasting, sitting on a Divine throne, victorious over all His enemies, and ruling in righteousness ; they worshippers, servants, subjects, creatures, perishable like all created beings.

When we look closely into the argument in its details, we find that for us the proof is much less plain than the thing proved. We have no difficulty in believing that Christ is greater than angels ; that truth for us is axiomatic. But the citations by which the thesis is established bristle with perplexities of all sorts. There is hardly a text in this Old Testament mosaic that does not present its problem to our minds, soluble perhaps, but by its existence weakening the religious impression which the whole passage may be assumed to have made on minds for which our difficulties had no existence.

These problems, critical and exegetical, I shall lightly touch, just sufficiently to indicate their nature, and the direction in which solution lies. After these have been thus disposed of, we shall be in a better position for realiz-

ing the broad effect of the contrast which runs through the quotations.

The seven quotations have for their general aim to show the surpassing excellence of Christ's *name* as set forth in the Scriptures, His Messianic inheritance from Old Testament prophecy. Some divide them into two heads: those which relate to the *more excellent Name*, and those which relate to *the better Dignity*; including under the former head the three quotations contained in vers. 5 and 6, and under the latter the four contained in vers. 7-14. There is no need for making such a rigid distinction. The two topics run into each other. The ostensible aim throughout is to show the kind of titles given to the Messiah. But into the demonstration of the name the dignity intrudes, for the simple reason that each implies the other. Thus in one text Christ is exhibited as a Divine King. It is a name and also an office, or if you will an office and also a name.

Another solicitude of interpreters is to determine the relation of the citations to the "states" of Christ. Do the statements contained therein refer all and exclusively to the state of exaltation? The bias of those who are anxious to make this out is evident. It is to interpret the texts in accordance with their view of the writer's doctrine concerning the position of the angels in the world. According to this view, the writer conceived of the angels as the rulers of the present visible world. To their dominion men in general were subject, and Christ also while He was on earth. The contrast drawn in the first part of the epistle between Christ and the angels is really a contrast between two worlds—the present world and the world to come; and between two universal administrations, that of angels in the world about to pass away, and that of Christ and men in the new world about to come in. Before Christ ascended to heaven He belonged to the old world; therefore, in common with all men, He was subject to the angels. If

this be so, then it is easy to see what must be done with texts in which Christ is represented as superior to angels. They must be relegated to the state of exaltation wherein He *became* better than the angels.

I am not convinced that the doctrine imputed to the writer was held by him, nor am I inclined to look at those texts under the bias of such an imputation. So far as I see, what the writer ascribes to Christ in the state of exaltation is signal and absolute superiority to angels, not a superiority implying the absolute negation of it in the earthly state. But I do not feel that this view requires me to interpret the texts under the opposite bias; that is, with the desire to make them refer to the pre-existent or earthly state. For suppose it were made out that all those texts as a matter of fact refer to the exaltation, what would that imply? Not the denial of Christ's superiority to angels in previous conditions, but simply the affirmation that, whatever might be true of previous conditions, He was at all events signally superior to them in the exalted state. Nay, suppose it could be proved that the writer expressly selected texts which could only apply to the state of exaltation, it would not follow that he entertained the opinion that Christ was subject to angels in the earthly state. His choice might be dictated by an apologetic aim. Writing to men to whom the humiliation of Christ was a stumblingblock, it was obviously desirable that he should show them that of the superiority of the exalted Christ, at all events, over angels, there could be no doubt; arguing to this effect: Ye have high thoughts of the position of angels, and in comparison with them, Jesus on earth may seem to occupy a mean station. But now the tables are turned, the positions of the parties are reversed; the first is become last, and the last first.

Questions may be raised either as to the *relevancy* or as to the *legitimacy* of these citations. They are relevant

if the passages quoted refer to the Messiah. The writer assumes that they do, and he takes for granted that the assumption will not be disputed by his readers. Not only so, he assumes that these texts are directly and exclusively Messianic; he proceeds on the same assumption in reference to all Messianic citations through the epistle. His interest in the Old Testament is purely religious. He thinks not of what meaning these holy writings might have for the contemporaries of the writers, but only of the meaning they have for his own generation. This need cause no trouble. The limited, practical view taken of Old Testament prophecy by New Testament writers is no law for us, and ought not to be regarded as interdicting the scientific historical interpretation of the prophetic writings. It were a more serious matter if it should be found that passages cited as Messianic had no reference whatever to the Messiah, either directly or indirectly. Now on first view of at least some of these quotations, it certainly seems as if the writer thought himself at liberty to quote as Messianic any statement about either God or man that appeared to suit his purpose. Which of us would have thought the passage quoted from Psalm cii. 10-12 applicable to Messiah? Yet on second thoughts we discover that consciously or instinctively, the writer proceeds on a principle, and does not quote at haphazard. Two principles underlie the group of quotations: that all statements concerning men, say, kings of Israel, which rise above the historical reality into the ideal are Messianic; and that statements concerning Jehovah viewed as the Saviour of the latter days are also to be regarded as Messianic. The former of these principles applies to the first two quotations in ver. 5, and to the fifth and seventh in vers. 8, 9, and 13. All these passages may be regarded as referring originally to a king of Israel, to Solomon, or some other; but in each case there is an ideal element which could not be applied to the

historical reality without extravagance. "I have *begotten* thee," "Thy throne, O God," or even "thy throne of God," the words implying in either case Divine dignity, "Sit on my right hand," taken along with "thou art a priest *for ever*." The latter of the two principles above stated applies to the quotation from Psalm cii., which speaks of a time coming when Jehovah shall build up Zion, and when the kingdoms of the world shall join with Israel in serving Him. It is possible that the writer regarded this text as Messianic, because in his view creation was the work of the pre-existent Christ. But it is equally possible that he ascribed creative agency to Christ out of regard to this and other similar texts, believed to be Messianic on other grounds.

The third quotation, ver. 6, presents a complication of difficulties. First, whence is it taken? Substantially the sentiment occurs in Psalm xcvi. 7, "Worship Him, all ye gods" (angels, Sept.). But the "and" (*καί*) with which the quotation begins forbids our regarding the psalm as its source. The sentence, word for word, including the "and," occurs in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy xxxii. 43, and there can be little doubt that it was from that place the writer made the citation. But at that place the Septuagint diverges widely from the Hebrew text as we know it. The verse in that version consist of four clauses, only one of which, the third, has words answering to it in the Hebrew. It is the second clause which is quoted in Hebrews i. 6. Thus the question arises, With what propriety can use be made in an important argument of words quoted from the Septuagint which have nothing answering to them in the Hebrew original? This is a question of *legitimacy*. Now it is possible, of course, that the Greek translators found Hebrew words corresponding to their version in the codex they used, but as that is only a possibility we cannot evade the question just put. The answer offered by apologetic

commentators is, that the thought contained in the quotation is found elsewhere in Scripture, as, *e.g.*, in the above cited psalm, and that therefore no wrong is done to the teaching of the sacred writings in the original tongues by quoting from the Septuagint a passage to which there is nothing corresponding in the Hebrew. This consideration is for our benefit. For the first readers there was no difficulty. For them, as for the writer, the Septuagint *was* Scripture; and hence throughout the book it is always quoted without hesitation, and apparently without reference to the question how far it corresponded with the Hebrew original. For us the Septuagint is nothing more than a translation, sometimes accurate, sometimes the reverse, based on a codex which might have many defects. Hence the argument of the epistle cannot always carry with us the weight it had with the first readers. Nor is it necessary it should. What we have mainly to do with is the essential teaching, the principles which the arguments are adduced to establish. Arguments are for an age, principles are for all time.

Why did the writer take the citation from Deuteronomy rather than from the psalm? Possibly because it was the first place in Scripture where the thought occurred; possibly because he found the thought embedded there in a passage Messianic in its scope, on the second of the two principles above enunciated: for therein Jehovah is represented as appearing in the latter days for the deliverance of Israel by the judgment of her and His adversaries. If the Messianic reference be admitted, of course the use of the text in a eulogy on the Son is legitimate. But we observe that the writer calls the Son the "first begotten," and speaks of Him as introduced into the inhabited world on the occasion to which the text refers. Whence the title? and what is meant by this introduction? As to the title, the writer possibly regarded it as implicitly contained in the texts quoted in ver. 5; or he may have had in his mind

the words, "I will make him my first born," occurring in Psalm lxxxix. 27, which, like the first two texts, refers to the promise made to David through Nathan. In the latter case, the use of the title here is virtually the introduction of another quotation illustrative of the excellent name conferred on the Son. It is as if he had written: "Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again: I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son; and again: I will make Him My first begotten."

By these texts the Son is placed in a position of peerless eminence, in a unique relation to God. The next text, that taken from Deuteronomy, assigns to the angels, though also called sons of God in Scripture, the lowly position of worshippers. "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Such is the order given out "when He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world." What does this mean? Does the writer think of the generation of the Son as eternal, and speak of the introduction into the world in relation thereto? In that case we must interpret his meaning thus: The Son is eternally the Father's first begotten. As such He is eternally worthy to be worshipped. Accordingly, when first the eternal Son is introduced into the world of men, and on the stage of history, He is announced as one entitled to receive homage even from those who rank highest in the scale of created beings. The antithesis is between eternal Sonship before the world was, and manifestation in the world as the worshipped Lord. The style is dramatic, as in chap. v. 10, "Hailed, saluted by God, High Priest after the order of Melchisedec!" It is poetry, not dogmatic theology.

Some find in the text an implied antithesis between a first and a second introduction of the Son into the *oikoumene*, and understand the writer as referring to the later event; that is, to the second coming of the Son from

heaven, at the end of the world, accompanied by a host of angels. Their chief grounds are the fact that the place in Deuteronomy from which the text is taken speaks of judgment, and the position of "again" (πάλιw) in the sentence requiring us to render, not "and again when," but "and when again," and naturally suggesting connexion with the nearest verb: "And when *again* He bringeth in." Against this however is the previous use of the πάλιw in ver. 5, to introduce a second quotation. It is natural to suppose that it is used a second time in the same way to introduce a third quotation, and if the writer had meant to hint at a second introduction into the world the probability is that he would have used another word signifying a second time, say δέυτερον. Further, how very unlikely that he would in this abrupt way refer to a second coming without any mention of the first! It is therefore much more probable that the "again" is to be taken with "He saith," that is, as introducing another quotation, and that its transposition is to be regarded as a rhetorical negligence such as might occur in our own speech; for we also might say or write, "When, again," etc., when we meant "again, when." The aorist of the verb rendered "bringeth in" in our Authorized Version has been referred to as a difficulty, as requiring the rendering "shall have brought in." But a certain incongruity remains even on that rendering; for the present tense, "He saith," does not suit the future perfect.¹ On the whole therefore I have little hesitation in adhering to the translation as it stands in our version. I have no

¹ Our Revisers have treated *εἰσαγάγη* as a present, though putting the future perfect rendering in the margin. But the grammarians insist that the aorist subjunctive with *δταν* must always be rendered as a future perfect. Be it so; in the present instance future from what point of view? From the writer's living in the end of the days, or from the day when the Son is begotten? We may conceive him placing himself back in the eternal "to-day" of the Son's generation, and looking forward into time. So viewed, the "when He shall have brought the First-begotten into the world" might refer to an event happening at any time in the world's history.

dogmatic bias against the other rendering, for even if it were certain that the writer understood his quotation as referring to the second coming, and as conferring on Christ a claim to the homage of angels in that connexion, it would not follow that he meant to negative a similar claim for any other period in Christ's history. He might say, Christ according to the Scriptures is to be worshipped by the angels at His second coming, and believe that He was also to be worshipped by them even in the state of humiliation. And may not we believe the same? When was Christ ever more worthy to be worshipped? The angels did worship Him then, unless they be incapable of appreciating Divine self-sacrifice, and, like men of the world, know no other test of worth except external position; honouring not goodness, but the pedestal it stands on.

The quotation we have been considering refers indirectly to angels, assigning to them a place of subordination to the Son. The one which follows in ver. 7 refers to them directly. It is the only one of the seven quotations which does contain a direct statement concerning the angels, so that it is of great importance as revealing the writer's conception of their position in the universe. In reference to this quotation there is a preliminary question of legitimacy to be considered. The words are an exact reproduction of the Septuagint version of Psalm civ. 4; their sense in English being, "who maketh His angels *winds* (not spirits, as in A.V.), and His ministers a flame of fire." But it has been doubted whether the Greek version is a correct rendering of the Hebrew. It is held by some commentators of good name, including Calvin, that the proper translation is, "who maketh the winds His messengers, and flaming fire His ministers"; according to which the passage contains no reference whatever to angels. And it must be confessed that a reference to angels seems out of place in the connexion of thought. The psalm is a Hymn of

Creation—a free poetic version of creation's story; and in the foregoing context the psalmist praises God as the Maker of the light, and of the visible heavens, and of the clouds, and of the waters; and one expects to read in such a connexion of wind and fire, but not of angels. Recent Hebrew scholarship however defends the Septuagint version, and the opinion gains ground that it faithfully reflects the original. In that case there is no question of legitimacy, but while a doubt remains the question will intrude itself, Of what value is a statement concerning angels occurring merely in the Septuagint, and having nothing answering to it in the Hebrew text? And the reply must be similar to that given in connexion with the previous quotation from Deuteronomy. The words express a scriptural idea, if not an idea to be found in that particular place. It occurs in the preceding psalm, the one hundred and third. The words, "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word: bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts, ye ministers of His that do His pleasure," suggest the idea of a multitude of ministering spirits who surround the throne of the Sovereign of the universe, and who are continually receiving commissions and being sent on errands in the administration of the Divine King—essentially the same idea as that contained in the text quoted from Psalm civ. "Who," asks Ebrard (who regards the Septuagint version as a mistranslation), "would find fault with a preacher who preached an excellent sermon on the words, 'The heart of a man is a defiant and desponding thing?' (Luther's version of the text rendered in the English Bible 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.')

The thought is biblical, though it does not occur in that particular place. Even so here."

With reference to angels then He saith, "Who maketh His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire." Is

this a poetic comparison suggestive of swift movement and mighty power? or is it a statement concerning the nature of angels—implying that angels are transformable into winds and flames; in fact, that they are the elements and forces of nature (as we speak) under another name? It may have been poetry at first, but it tended, as time went on, to become dogmatic prose. In the Jewish theory of the universe, angelic agency occupied substantially the same place as physical causation in ours. Hence there were as many angels as things or events. "There is not a thing in the world," saith the Talmud, "not even a tiny blade of grass, over which there is not an angel set." I think however, that what the writer of our epistle was chiefly interested in, was not the physical constitution, so to speak, of the angels, but their functions; not that they were fire-like or wind-like, but that they were messengers and ministers. This is what he finds said of them in the one representative text he quotes concerning them. This is the name they have inherited. Christ is called the Son, the First-begotten, a Divine King, the Creator. They are called simply ministers, mere instruments like the will-less, unconscious elements. No word of rule or dominion, only of service. Why did the writer, having quoted Deuteronomy in reference to the First-begotten, not quote from the same chapter those words concerning the angels, "He fixed the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God," suggesting the idea that each nation has set over it an angelic prince?

Now having done with detailed comment and criticism of texts, let us note the contrast which runs through this group of quotations concerning Christ and the angels. Properly there is only one radical contrast, but it has three phases; *viz.* Son and servants, King and subjects, Creator and creatures. Christ is the Son of God, angels are the servants of God. They too are sons, but in comparison

with the sonship of the First-begotten their sonship is not worthy to be mentioned, and is not mentioned. They simply appear as ministers of the Divine will. This is the contrast suggested in vers. 5-7. Then, secondly, Christ is a Divine King, sitting on a throne of omnipotence exercised in behalf of righteousness. The angels are His subjects. For the God who maketh His angels winds is none other than the God who sits on the throne of righteousness. Formally He is to be distinguished from the latter, inasmuch as He is represented as addressing the Son: "To the Son He saith." But the King is the Creator, and it is the Creator and Governor of the world who maketh His angels winds. This contrast between King and subjects is contained in vers. 7-9. Finally, Christ is the Creator, and the angels are His creatures: He everlasting; they, like all created beings, perishable. Creatureliness is not expressly predicated of angels in the last quotation (vers. 10-12), but it is implied in the comparison of them to winds and flames, which connects them with the elements and involves them in their doom. The one statement concerning angels in ver. 7 stands in antithesis to the two following statements concerning the Son: "With regard to the angels, He saith," etc., but with regard to the Son, that He is a Divine King, and also that He is a Divine Creator. Even the rabbis thought of the angels as perishable like all other creatures. "Day by day," they said, "the angels of service are created out of the fire-stream, and sing a song and disappear, as is said in Lamentations iii. 23, 'They are new every morning.'" This final contrast is contained in ver. 7 and vers. 10-12.

The writer concludes his argument with a final statement about the angels in interrogative form. "Are they not *all ministering* spirits?" He brings the whole class under the category of service, not dominion, for the words "all" and "ministering" are emphatic. None are excepted, not even

the highest in rank, not even the princes of the nations, who rule not but act as tutelary spirits, guardian angels. The statement that they all *serve* is absolute, not merely relative to the kingdom of redemption, concerning which a supplementary statement is made in the closing words, "being sent forth for ministry for the sake of those who are about to inherit salvation." Service is not an incident in the history of angels; it is their whole history.

This category suits the nature of angels so far as we have the means of knowing it. They are associated with the elements and powers of nature—are these under another name. They are changeable in form, appearing now as winds, now as fire. They are perishable, transient, as the pestilence and the storm, as tongues of flame, or the clouds, or the dew. They are one and many in turn: the one splitting up into the many, and the many recombining into one. They are impersonal, or imperfectly personal, lacking will and self-consciousness. Thinking, deliberating, resolving is not their affair, but execution: "Ye ministers of His that do His pleasure." They are incapacitated for rule by the simplicity of their nature. The angel-princes cannot take a wide survey of a nation's character and desert, like the prophets. They are blind partisans, mere personifications of national spirit. As a matter of course each angel-prince takes his nation's side in a quarrel. The prince of Persia is on the side of Persia, and the prince of Greece on the side of Greece. A human will is the meeting-place of many forces brought into harmony; an angelic will is a single force moving in a straight line towards a point. Angels are mere manifestations or expressions of the will of God. To impute to them dominion were to infringe on the monarchy of God; it were to reinstate paganism. Angel-worship is nature-worship under another name, not improved by the change of name. No wonder the author of our epistle is so careful to connect angels with the idea

of service. It is his protest against the angelolatry which had crept into Israel from Persian sources.

In chap. ii. 1-4 we have the first of those exhortations which come in at intervals throughout the epistle, relieving the argument and applying it at each point. This exhortation reveals the purpose of the foregoing comparison between Christ and the angels. It is to establish Christ's superior claim to be heard when He speaks in God's name to men. As in Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrim, and in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, angelic agency in Divine revelation is recognised, that is, in the revelation of the law on Sinai. How far the recognition expresses personal conviction in either of these instances, or is merely an accommodation to existing opinion, need not be discussed. It is enough in the present instance to say that the writer is aware of current modes of thought, and if he does not sympathise with them, at least accommodates his reasoning to them so far as to regard the law as a "word spoken by angels."

Law and gospel might have been compared on their own merits, as is done by Paul in 2 Corinthians iii. 6 in a series of contrasts. But the power of appreciating the gospel being defective in the Hebrew Christians, it is the merits of the speakers that is insisted on, though the incomparable worth of the gospel is implicitly asserted in the phrase, "so great salvation." The admonition, delicately expressed in the first person, is to this effect: "I have shown how vastly greater Christ is than angels in name and dignity. In proportion to the august dignity of Him by whom God hath in the end of the days spoken to men ought to be the attention paid to His words. Let us then give due, even the most earnest possible, heed to the things which, directly or indirectly, we have heard from His lips, out of respect to Him, and also out of regard to our own spiritual interests,

which are imperilled by negligence. Respecting as we do the word of angels, let us respect more His word."

Why should there be any difficulty in acting on such reasonable counsel? Because the word of Christ is new, and the word of angels is old, and has the force of venerable custom on its side. This difference is hinted at in the words, "lest at any time (or haply) we drift away." The figure is a very significant one. It warns the Hebrews to beware lest they be carried away from the salvation preached by Christ, the blessings of the kingdom of God, as a boat is carried past the landing-place by the strong current of a river. The warning is of permanent value. For there are currents of thought and feeling and action on which men are afloat, and which if not resisted carry down to the sea of spiritual death: currents of irreligion, worldliness, and the like. But the current by which the Hebrews were in danger of being carried headlong was that of established religious custom, which in transition times is specially perilous. By this current they were in danger of being carried away from the gospel and Christ and the eternal hope connected with faith in Him down to the Dead Sea of Judaism, and so of being involved in the calamities which were soon to overwhelm in ruin the unbelieving Jewish nation. How much is suggested by those two words *μή ποτε παραρνώμεν!* They warn against national ruin, if not the loss eternal of the soul; they indicate as the cause of risk the strong current of use and wont, flowing away from the new world of Christianity towards the old world of Judaism, difficult to stem because so strong, its very strength appearing a reason why no resistance should be offered: for why go against an almost unanimous public opinion? what danger in following the multitude? How apt men situated as the Hebrew Christians were are to say: We follow the religious customs of our pious forefathers, we observe the word of God spoken to them by angels on Sinai

millenniums ago; therefore we dread no evil, though we neglect the doctrine of Jesus, which requires us to break with the old and take up with something new and revolutionary.

The exhortation to give heed to Christ's teaching is enforced by three reasons: It is the teaching of the Lord; the penalty of neglect is great; the teaching is well attested. The word of the great salvation began to be spoken *by the Lord*. The Lord means for the Hebrew readers Christ seated on His heavenly throne. The gospel is the word spoken by one who is now the exalted Lord, and the writer would have his readers view it in the light of that fact. It is a way of lending importance by external considerations to a doctrine not appreciated on its own merits. For himself the gospel stands on its own merits. It does not need to be invested with the glory of the exaltation in order to receive his attention. It is welcome to him as the word of the man Jesus. The man Jesus is for him Lord, even in His humble earthly state. He does not need to think of Him as sitting on His heavenly throne that he may be enabled to resist the temptation to give less heed to His word than to that spoken through angels on Sinai. The temptation does not exist for him. In comparison with the words of Jesus recorded in the gospels the law is as moonlight to sunlight. It is to be feared that those who are otherwise minded will get little help from the thought that He who spake these words is now glorified. It is not true faith which needs the exaltation to open its eyes. To such faith the exalted One says, "I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in."

The word spoken through angels may appear a very solemn matter. Yet after all it was a word at second-hand. The law was given by God to angels, then by angels to Moses, who in turn gave it to Israel. The gospel came from God immediately, for Jesus was God incarnate speaking to men in human form.

The penalty of neglecting this last word of God is great. "How shall we escape?" The penalty is enhanced by the nature of the word. It is a word of grace, of salvation. The old word was a word of duty. But it is far more culpable to sin against love than against law, to despise God's mercy than to break His commandments. If breaches of the law had penalties attached, what must be the consequence of despising the gospel? The question needs no answer; every man can answer it for himself.

For those who scorn arguments drawn from fear of consequences a more genial inducement is added. The teaching of Christ is well attested. The word which took its beginning from Jesus was afterwards confirmed by them who heard Him, their word being in turn confirmed by various miraculous accompaniments. The writer means to say that he and those to whom he writes, though not enjoying the advantage of having heard Jesus Himself speak the words of salvation, are put practically by this twofold attestation in the same position as those who did hear Him. In a sense the doctrine comes to them at second-hand, through the medium of the companions of Jesus; but the teaching of the apostles is only an echo of the teaching of their Lord. Their voice is but His voice repeated. They simply report what they have seen and heard, the deeds and the sayings of their Master; their competency and honesty being guaranteed by the miraculous powers conferred upon them. It is obvious that the claim thus made to be virtually in the position of personal hearers of Jesus implies a knowledge of His teaching such as we possess by means of the Synoptical Gospels. I say the Synoptical Gospels, because in the view of even some believing theologians, such as Weiss, the form in which Christ's words appear in the Fourth Gospel is, to a certain extent, secondary, the writer acting not merely as a reporter but as an interpreter. It is not necessary to suppose

that the author of our epistle was acquainted with our Gospels, but we are justified by the manner in which he expresses himself in thinking that he was familiar with the evangelic tradition whereof we have the written record in our Synoptical Gospels. The impression created by a perusal of the epistle bears out this view. The image of Christ presented therein rests on a solid basis of fact. The writer knows of the temptations of Jesus, of His life of faith, and the scope that His experience afforded for the exercise of faith, of His agony in the garden, of the contradictions He endured at the hands of ignorant, prejudiced, evil-minded men; of His gentle, compassionate bearing towards the erring; of the fact that He occupied Himself in preaching the gospel of the kingdom; and also of the fact that He was surrounded by a circle of friends and disciples, whose connexion with Him was so close that they could be trusted to give a reliable account of His public ministry. Of course the man who knew so much had the means of knowing much more. It will be interesting and instructive to learn what conception of Christianity is entertained by one who is well acquainted with the historical data lying at the foundation. We observe that the word he employs to denote the subject of Christ's preaching is secondary, reminding us of the style of the apostolic Church rather than of Christ Himself. Christ spoke of the kingdom, our author speaks of "salvation." But let not that be to his prejudice. The word is universally current and convenient, and as good as any other, provided the right meaning be attached to it. We shall find that the thing so named is presented under many aspects, citizenship in the kingdom, though not prominent, being included among them.

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