

## JESUS CROWNED FOR DEATH.

HEBREWS II. 5-9.

It is almost presumptuous for any third party to interpose in a discussion between scholars so eminent and honoured as Drs. Bruce and Davidson, and upon a subject of such difficulty and such importance as the interpretation of Hebrews ii. 9.

“Non nostrum inter vos tantas componere lites.”

The writer's apology lies in the fact that the passage in question is one that needs to be examined from different points of view; and that it has possessed for himself, ever since he began to study the Greek Testament, a peculiar fascination. He has long been convinced that the traditional construction of this verse is on grammatical grounds quite untenable; and has been led, independently, to a line of interpretation looking in the same direction as that so ably developed by Drs. Bruce and Matheson, though not altogether coincident with it. Hofmann,<sup>1</sup> to his thinking, throws a more searching light upon this subtle and profound text than any other modern exegete.

Let us however, with Dr. Davidson, dismiss all “fine modern ideas,” and at the same time those “scriptural conceptions” which are sometimes but another name for theological prejudgments, and an innocent cover for attempts to force the language of one inspired writer into the mould taken by the mind of another. We are dealing in this

<sup>1</sup> J. C. K. von Hofmann: *Die heilige Schrift neuen Testaments (fünfter Theil; Hebräerbrief)*. Hofmann's exegesis is marred too often by the caprice and strained ingenuity which Meyer exposes so unsparingly. He is nevertheless an expositor of profound learning and brilliant originality. His method is most instructive and stimulating; and his work teems with keen criticisms and luminous *aperçus*. One learns almost as much when differing from him as when agreeing with him.

great epistle with a truly Pauline man, but an independent thinker, and one who has good right to be heard on his own account. The *πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως* with which he begins is an advertisement to this effect. Let us watch him as he pens these solemn and inspiring words, with the Old Testament open by his side, and the life and death of Jesus spread like a living picture before his memory, writing to his Hebrew Christian brethren on the eve of the fall of their national Judaism, and striving to assure them of the stability of the "new and better covenant," and the completeness of the salvation which it brings, and, above all, to raise them to a worthier conception of the glory and perfectness of their High Priest and Mediator.

The starting-point of the writer's thought in chap. ii. 5 we find in the last words of chap. i. The angels, he says, "are ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of the destined heirs of salvation." The interjected homily imports no new thought, but simply enforces what has been already said, the apostle at the end of it resuming the thread of his previous exposition. Now what is the idea suggested by the animated question of chap. i. 14? It is surely that of *the nobility of man*, the honour put upon "the heirs of salvation" and the glory of their calling, in whose interest the angels are engaged, those flaming messengers of the heavenly court, worshippers and servants of the Son "in whom" God thought fit to "speak to us." If the greatness of the Son of God, as author of the new revelation, is the reflection uppermost in the writer's mind, the dignity of those to whom He thus speaks, the importance of their position and the grave responsibility it brings upon them, are no less present to his thoughts. It is this consideration that gives its peculiar urgency to the appeal, "How shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" This underlying sense of the unparalleled distinction accruing to the status of Christian believers comes out again and

again in the course of the epistle. "Holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling," who may "enter boldly into the holy place," for whom "God provided a better thing" than for the greatest of His ancient saints, "receiving the promise of an eternal inheritance" and "a kingdom that cannot be shaken": in such terms the apostle exhorts the desponding Hebrews, rousing them to a higher sense of the grandeur of their vocation and destiny as redeemed men, while he sets before them the supreme greatness, at once Divine and human, of their Redeemer.

To "those who shall be heirs of salvation" therefore, "not to angels," belongs "the world<sup>1</sup> that shall be." We catch in the emphatic *τὴν μέλλουσαν* of this verse a clear echo of the triumphant *διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν* of chap. i. 14. Not to angels, but to men, heirs of God's promise, is the glorious world to be subject which prophecy describes, and of which the Christian teacher has to speak (ver. 5). *Man is to be lord in man's world.* While the angels in the kingdom of God's Son play a subsidiary but most willing part, to mankind He holds a more intimate relation. "Partakers of Christ," who is "Son over His house," the heirs of salvation "receive a kingdom" in which, as it is promised in the Apocalypse, they shall at last "sit down with Him in His throne." Such is the goal of the Christian salvation, the inheritance that Christ confers on His true brethren. The path of suffering by which it is attained, the way in which Christ has identified Himself with men and linked their destiny to His own, the sequel has to show.

It is primarily to support the assertion of man's promised greatness that the eighth Psalm is put in evidence (vers.

*τὴν οἰκουμένην, the inhabited world, the world as the home of man, into which "the First-born" will be "brought again" (chap. i. 6). It is in this connexion—not as the metaphysical Universe—that the πάντα and τὰ πάντα of Ps. viii. and of this context must be understood. Comp. Wisdom i. 7.*

6-8). What is earth-born man? Poor insignificance! he stands looking up to the splendour and majesty of God's eternal heavens! Strange that the Maker of those gleaming, unnumbered worlds should have regard to him! And yet God has stamped on man His image, setting him not far below His angels,<sup>1</sup> crowning him with glory and honour, and making the world a realm for him to rule. Such is the ideal view of man's relation to his own world. It is upon this pattern that his renewal is to be effected, as St. Paul has already taught us, "after the image of Him that created him" (Col. iii. 10). Man's salvation cannot stop short of the recovery of this lapsed dominion. And our teacher will not have this heritage diminished, nor the ideal of human dignity and power lowered in any wise to the level of the humiliating fact: "For in subjecting all things to man, there is nothing that He left unsubjected to him." So far, let us observe, the apostle's question is simply that of the psalmist, "What is man? or man's son (Adam's race)?"—a phrase that we have no business to turn into "*the Son of man*," as though it were a designation of Christ alone. We rob ourselves of the precious import of the Psalm when we force it, unwarrantably, into the Messianic grooves. The New Testament writers do not use the older Scriptures in such fanciful and arbitrary fashion as seems to be often assumed. It is man's estate, designed for him from creation, that is held out to the view of Christian faith; and we are assured that no jot or tittle of the promise shall be allowed to fail.

Turn now from this ideal to the melancholy fact. "But now we see not yet all things made subject to him." There is a tragic *litotes* here: the stress of the sentence

<sup>1</sup> Here Shakespeare is no bad commentator. "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!" (*Hamlet*.)

rests on the words *made subject* (αὐτῶ τὰ πάντα ὑποταγμένα), indicating that the very opposite is the case; as when St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians xi. 22, "I praise you not," to express the severest blame.<sup>1</sup> Instead of being master of the world over which God set him, man is like a guilty, cowering slave, "all his lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death" (ver. 15). Death has reversed our lordship over nature, and changed it to servitude. At this point it is enough simply to state the negative fact. As things are, man's royalty is forfeited, his crown is in the dust; and the apostle, looking out on the world around him, says with a sigh, "We see not yet all things subjected to him." Clearly this supremacy, if it is ever to be attained and the Psalm is anything more than a poet's dream, belongs to some future world, to a state of things far different from the present, and can only be brought about by a great salvation.

But is this all we descry on the horizon? Is the world nothing for man but a scene of failure and discomfiture? Not so. The vision of the psalmist indeed "we see not yet"; it is prophecy. But there is something we *do see* that lifts our hopes to the highest pitch. There is One to whom the prophetic words apply as to no other son of man, in whom we have the earnest of their full accomplishment: "Him that hath been in some little set below the angels, even JESUS."

It is *Jesus*, Son of Mary, Child of man, whose appearance we hail; not now, as in chap. i., *the Son of God*, resplendent in His Father's glory with His holy angels, sustaining creation by His word. The writer is approaching the Redeemer's person from the opposite side, and adopting quite a different line of reflection from that with which the epistle commenced. He will afterwards unite both conceptions in

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in ver. 11 below, Christ "is not ashamed to call them brethren,"—rejoicing, glorying therein (Bruce).

his definition of "our great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God." We must allow him to work out his argument in his own way.

Here is a Man then in whom humanity is lifted from the dust, and once more grows conscious of its primal dignity. The advent of Jesus raises immeasurably our conception of the possibilities of human nature, and supplies a new and magnificent answer to the old question, "What is man?" Prophecy is outdone by what we see in Jesus of man's greatness as the object of the Divine regard. And this Leader of our salvation is "forerunner" of His brethren's exaltation, both in earth and heaven.

On every ground we find ourselves compelled to refer the predicate "crowned with glory and honour," in ver. 9, to *the earthly life and human relationship* of our Saviour. Surely it is in this environment that we see Jesus (*βλέπομεν Ἰησοῦν*). It is amazing that exegetes like Kurtz and Lüne-mann should render *βλέπομεν* "see with the eyes of faith," or, "the eyes of the spirit," and refer to chap. iii. 19 in proof! If there is a word in the New Testament that denotes *sight as opposed to faith*, it is just this verb *βλέπω*. "Faith," in chap. xi. 1, is a "proof of things not seen" (*οὐ βλεπομένων*); similarly in 2 Corinthians iv. 18, "the things seen (*τ. βλεπόμενα*) are temporal; but the things not seen (*τ. μὴ βλεπόμενα*), eternal."<sup>1</sup> What "we see" in chap. iii. 19 belongs not to the region of spiritual truth, but of historical fact. That their unbelief drove the Israelites back to the wilderness is a certainty to the Hebrew reader, "gross as a mountain, open, palpable." History verifies the teaching of faith. To misread *βλέπομεν* is to miss an essential point in the warning example given in chap. iii.

<sup>1</sup> Comp. also Heb. xi. 7, Rom. viii. 25, John ix. 7, etc., for the matter-of-fact character of the *seeing* denoted by *βλέπω*. The verb appears to be chosen here for this reason, in distinction from the more general *ὁρῶμεν* which precedes. "We do see," in contrast with "see," may serve to indicate this difference.

And what "we see" in the passage before us is to be found not in the supernal regions of Christ's heavenly reign, but in the familiar scenes of His blessed life on earth, in "the things which," as St. John says, "we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life." We to-day "see Jesus" in the story of the Four, as the readers of this letter saw Him in the living words of His eye-witnesses and ministers.

And "we see Him for<sup>1</sup> the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour." No words could more fitly express the strange blending of glory and suffering visible throughout the earthly course of Jesus,—glory ever leading on to suffering, and finding in death its climax and hidden purpose. If man's ideal greatness is the starting-point of the writer's thought, the death of the cross is always its centre. The former, for sinful (chap. i. 3) and death-bound man, can only win its realisation through the latter. *Jesus is crowned for death.* Willingly would Israel have given Him in life the Messiah's crown. They could not understand why One so high in the grace of God, so rich in kingly qualities and powers, did not take the last remaining step and mount to David's throne. Their fury against Him at the last was, in the breasts of many who cried, "Away with Him!" the rage of a bitter disappointment. They did not see that the higher He was raised in favour with God and men, the nearer and the more needful became His death. If this is a "fine modern idea," then also is that of "the corn of wheat" that "falls into the ground to die," and indeed the whole teaching of John xii. 12-33 comes under the same designation. It is enough to refer to the

<sup>1</sup> *διὰ*, on our view of the text, is almost equivalent to *εἰς*, and looks forward to the *ὅπως γέσγηται, κ.τ.λ.*, much as in chap. ix. 15, 1 Tim. i. 16, 2 Tim. ii. 10. It signifies, as always with the accusative, the *ground* or *reason* of the event specified; only in this case the reason lies in a subsequent, not, as commonly, a precedent event. There is the same *prospective διὰ* in Rom. iv. 25*b*, on the usual interpretation. See *Lidd. and Scott, διὰ*, B. iii. 2.

scene of the transfiguration,<sup>1</sup> and of the royal entry into Jerusalem, to show the profound connection which existed, alike in the mind of Jesus, in the purpose of God, and in the sequence of history, between Christ's human glorification and His sacrificial death.

Two important grammatical considerations remain to be noticed, which will serve further to elucidate, and, as we think, verify our construction of the text. The object of the verb "see," in ver. 9, according to the Greek order, is not "Jesus" in the first instance, but "Him that is made some little lower than angels,"<sup>2</sup> who is at once identified with "Jesus," for of Him this was manifestly and eminently true. Then follows the predicate, "for the suffering," etc. It is to be noted that the participles "made lower" and "crowned" are in precisely the same tense and grammatical form (*ἡλαττωμένον, ἐστεφανωμένον*: perfects passive). The presumption is that they denote *contemporary*, rather than successive states, just as it is with the corresponding verbs in the language of the Psalm. Had the apostle intended to distinguish by these expressions an antecedent and consequent condition, how easy for this master of Greek idiom—and how necessary with the parallelism of the psalmist leading the reader the other way—to have made the transition clear by a change of

<sup>1</sup> The words of 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, which we confidently claim as apostolic tradition, agree closely with those of the text: "We made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, being eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father *honour and glory*, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory . . . in the holy mount." Perhaps the writer of the Hebrews had this scene specifically before his mind. We note as at least a singular coincidence that the phrase *taste of death* occurs also in this context in the synoptic tradition (Matt. xvi. 28, Mark ix. 1, Luke ix. 27); it is used but once besides in the N.T.

<sup>2</sup> This is no term of disparagement in the Psalm, nor need it be here as applied to the earthly humanity of Jesus. It does not describe the *exinanition* of Philippians ii. 6, but refers to the contemporary states of different persons (*men, Jesus, and angels*), rather than the successive states of the same person (*the pre-incarnate and incarnate Son of God*).



tense (τ. ἐλλαττωθέντα), or by some distinctive adverb, as, for example, in our own couplet :

“High o’er the angelic bands He rears  
His once dishonoured head”!

But he does nothing of the kind, for he means nothing of the kind. While in His human guise Jesus was in some sort lower than the angels, at the same time, and notwithstanding, He was crowned with glory. Through all that is best in human life there runs the same mixture of honour and humbleness, of greatness crossed by the shadow of death.

But the ὅπως of the last clause is the *crux* of the common interpretation. When it is said, “crowned in order that He might taste death,” to make the “crowning” subsequent to the “death” is literally *preposterous*. The connexion is just as obvious and straightforward in the Greek as in the English. None of the many ingenious attempts that have been made to escape this inference, and to turn purpose into consequence—by shifting the order of the words, or by evading the force of the conjunction—is in the least satisfactory.<sup>1</sup> Surely the apostle must be allowed to have his own mind, and to be capable of expressing himself with reasonable plainness. No Greek reader, we venture to affirm, coming upon these words for the first time, and without theological prejudice, could have guessed that they meant anything else than that Jesus was crowned with the purpose that He might offer for all men the sacrifice of His death.

St. Paul’s teaching in Philippians ii. 5–11 has, it seems to us, dominated the exegesis of this text greatly to its

<sup>1</sup> This applies, we say it with profound respect, to Dr. Edwards’ rendering: “That He may have tasted death for every man” (*Expositor’s Bible*: “Hebrews,” p. 37), which seems to us to be neither good grammar nor clear sense. If the apostle meant, “that His tasting of death *might avail* for every man,” he knew how to say it.

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injury. Sublime and precious as the doctrine of that passage is, it does not contain the whole of Christology. The view it presents of Christ's earthly life as a state of exinanition and humiliation is that of a man in whose memory everything else paled before the vision of the celestial Jesus he had seen on the way to Damascus. But our author looks with different eyes; and he teaches us a truth only less important, and complementary to that enforced by the Apostle Paul. The life of Jesus was far other than one of mere ignominy and obscurity. From the Divine and heavenly side it was indeed a dark eclipse; but from the earthward side it was a splendid revelation. As His disciples looked upon His face, and watched His miracles, and listened to His words, "such as never man spake," and felt the spell of the moral majesty that clothed His person, the saying of the eighth Psalm must often, one thinks, have come to their minds. Seeing Jesus in the gospel story, we ourselves "glory in the Lord," and exult to think that He hath so regarded our low estate; we exult to think that humanity is thus ennobled, and that "He is not ashamed to call us brethren."

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