The Epistle to the Hebrews

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Preface and Introduction

With a new version.

Preface.

Not a few works of less or more value have been written on the grand Epistle to the Hebrews. Nevertheless room seemed to be left for an exposition, not occupied with the discussion of details, and demanded more than ever by the unbelieving spread in our day of ritualism, which it was written to supplant by the exhibition of the grace and truth in Christ's person, work, and office as Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. I therefore commend the work, notwithstanding every shortcoming, to Him who sent His Son in pitiful mercy to every creature, and in triumphant blessing for all that believe, awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

W.K. London, May, 1905.

Introduction.

From the absence of an address it has been doubted whether this is an epistle. The closing chapter however, with not a few confirmations less marked throughout, is proof positive that it has a real epistolary nature, though, like the letter to the saints in Rome, somewhat of a treatise also. Its contents demonstrate beyond just question that the epistle before us was directed to Jews professing the name of the Lord Jesus. For all would be truly applicable if not a Gentile were called at this time to believe. Beyond all other books of the New Testament it is as to every point of doctrine and even exhortation

based on the ancient scriptures familiar only to the people chosen of old. And the believing remnant of Jews as being the true “people” is strikingly kept before us throughout in Heb. 2:17; Heb. 4:9 (as the people of old in Heb. 5:3; Heb. 7:5, 11, 27); Heb. 8:10; Heb. 9:7 (29 bis; Heb. 10:30; Heb. 11:25; Heb. 13:12); as in 1 Peter 2:9, 10 bis (2 Peter 2:1; Jude 5). So indeed it is with the apostle Paul (Rom. 9:25 bis; Rom. 10: 21 Rom.; 11:1, 2; Rom.15:10 (21 pl.); 1 Cor. 10:7; 1 Cor. 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:16). The only exception is Titus 2:14, where “people” is used morally.

This stamps it with a character different, whoever the writer might be, from every other. It appeals to the Old Testament from first to last as no other epistle does. Yet the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets are made to speak, as it were, with new tongues. They all render a distinct, united, and glorious testimony, once earthly in the letter, now heavenly in spirit, to the Lord seated at God’s right hand, His proper position for the Christian. To lead on the believing Jew to know and enjoy Christ where He is, to worship and walk in this faith, is the prime object of the bright, glowing, deeply interesting, and instructive Epistle that claims our attention.

It is therefore the inspired exercise of the teacher’s gift rather than of the apostle and prophet announcing absolutely new revelations. There is no such language here as “I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery,” as in Rom. 11:25. There is not a word about his apostleship here, as in the two Epistles to the Corinthians; of the mystery of Christ, as to the Ephesians and the Colossians; nor even “this we say unto you by the word of the Lord,” as to the Thessalonians. The writer speaks of others as “those

that heard" the Lord; he himself is here a "teacher of" Israelites "in faith and verity." He simply cites and reasons on the ancient oracles as well as histories; he applies prophecies and expounds the types of the law but rarely, if ever, does he unveil the magnificent scenes of the latter day, when Israel shall be blessed, under Messiah and the new covenant, and the nations also in a circle, concentric indeed but not so close. He writes with the utmost fulness of Christ's exaltation on high in view of the heavenly calling and those who now partake of it before that day. In Heb. 4:9 he touches on the broad fact of "a sabbatism" which remains for the people of God when the wilderness is past, though without detail, when we who now believe have our "better" portion on high. We may also compare Heb. 12, when the circle of the future glory, earthly and heavenly, is grouped as that to which we have come by faith already, though only to be established and displayed when the Lord appears.

Christ is never spoken of as the Head, nor consequently is. the one body wherein the old differences vanish, nor that new man wherein is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all. The nearest approach to unity is that the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one. The assembly is of firstborn ones, viewed as an aggregate of individuals and not as the body of Christ. Those who composed it were heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; but joined to the Lord as one spirit and of His body is not said here.

This may be conceived by some as implying another hand rather than Paul's. But the inference is baseless. For though he alone develops the mystery concerning Christ and concerning the church, it is only in the

Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, with the First to the Corinthians practically and in that to the Romans allusively. In the rest of his epistles we find “the body” no more than in that to the Hebrews; and this as distinctly in the ordering of the Holy Spirit, as in those which contain it fully. Our individual relationships are no less important than our corporate. The divine design regulates the topics introduced as much as their appropriate handling. Each epistle or other book of Scripture is perfect for the purpose God had in view when He inspired each writer. As the main object in that to the Hebrews is Christ’s priesthood with its necessary basis, due adjuncts, and suited results, and as this is for the saints individually, the one body of Christ could not fittingly fall within its scope, if it were a divinely inspired composition, whether by Paul or by any other. Its central doctrine is, not we one with Him as members of His body, but He appearing before the face of God fog. us. Abiding for ever, having His priesthood unchangeable, He is able to save to the uttermost those that by Himself approach God, as He always lives to intercede for them. The same persons compose the body of Christ; but the associations are wholly distinct and only compatible through the fulness of Christ.

Some have wondered why Paul, if the writer, should not have given his name at the beginning. The peculiarity is at least equally true of any writer. It would in fact be more strange in one who had written no other epistle. If the great apostle wrote, its analogue is in the First Epistle of John, who does not prefix his name there, though in the two lesser he addresses himself “as elder” in a style unmistakably his own. In the Revelation, where the difference of the subject-matter calls for a

manner of writing wholly distinct from either his Gospel or his Epistles, his name appears alike in the preface and in the conclusion. Is not this self-evidently as it should be?

Now supposing Paul to have written the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is not difficult to suggest weighty motives for his putting forward, not his own name and apostolic authority, but such a treatment of the Old Testament scriptures as must carry divine light and firm conviction to all who weigh them before God. That the Hebrew Christians were prejudiced and disputatious even in early days is a fact beyond question for one who reads Acts 11, 15, 21, to cite nothing else. They could not but feel that the doctrine of the apostle had a depth, and height, and comprehensiveness which for those so long swathed in Jewish bands made it a strain to follow him. He was apostle of the uncircumcision, in itself no small trial to ordinary minds of their mould, as we may assuredly conclude even from the apostles Peter and Barnabas, favoured as they had personally been of God toward Gentiles. Therefore does the writer, supposing him to be Paul, approach them with the most consummate delicacy and tact, as his burning love for his brethren — doubly brethren, both after the flesh and now after the Spirit — would dictate. He becomes as a Jew that he might gain the Jews; to them that were under the law as under law, though being himself not under law, that he might gain those under law. The omission of his name had thus at the starting-point a special propriety in his case beyond that of any other man.

Another ground for its omission is plain from the unusual task before him. The force of the appeal lay in

its coming from the first and throughout with the authority of God; and to Jewish Christians this could be effected in no way so telling as that here employed. “In many measures and in many manners God, having spoken of old to the fathers in the prophets, spoke to us in a [or, the] Son whom He constituted heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1, 2). How enfeebling would have been the apostle’s introduction of himself in such a connection! Even we who were of the Gentiles, and who are of the church, would feel it in either way out of place, aesthetically in the one instance, spiritually in the other. For the Hebrew Christian no method so impressive, welcome, and authoritative. It was the true end of controversy. Impossible to evade or to gainsay that which carried in itself the evidence of God’s mind revealed in His word — at least to a believer.

Hence all flows on the ground of what is confessedly divine; and any living man’s authority, however truly conferred of God and admitted by believers, would be felt rather to interfere than to be seasonable. Therefore we hear in Heb. 2 of the word which, having had its commencement in being spoken “by the Lord,” was confirmed to us by those that heard, even thus God also bearing witness both by signs and wonders, and manifold powers and distributions of the Holy Ghost according to His own will. In like beautiful accordance Jesus is shown in Heb. 3 to be the Apostle as well as High Priest of our confession. Clearly therefore it is superficial in the extreme to reason on Heb. 2:3, 4, as evidence against Paul’s authorship. Those who were designated apostles by the Lord on earth are merely “those that heard “; and as Saul then was but an

unbeliever of Israel like the mass, he graciously sinks himself among the rest as “to us.” Just thus, long after he was an apostle by call, he could say on meet occasion, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia,” and even “I am a Pharisee, son of Pharisees,” and “according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” It would have been self-importance, not gracious wisdom, to have asserted his apostleship in this place, writing as he was by the will and inspiration of God, but evidently outside his special field of the nations, as laid down in Gal. 2:7-9 and elsewhere. It was a final warning to the Christian Jews; and who so fitted in love no less than in everything else as one who had ere this testified to the Roman Christians that he loved the ancient people as much as Moses, when he asked Jehovah to blot him out of His book if He would not forgive their sin? As the apostle of the circumcision had been employed, and not Paul, to open the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles (Acts 10), so did the only wise God use the apostle of the uncircumcision, and not Peter, to summon for the last time the Hebrew Christians, whose attachment to the old and earthly system He had so long borne with, but would not any more.

No doubt there were not a few who had learnt better than the amalgam which had hitherto prevailed in Jerusalem among the baptised. But the time was come, and the most suited instrument ever raised up on earth, to bring to a close a state of things abnormal to the spiritual eye, and dangerous for the carnal: who, even if they love the Lord at bottom, are apt to fluctuate and more prone to palliate and foster natural and educational inclinations than to judge them by the word. Jerusalem was about to pass visibly away with the

temple, ritual, and priesthood. It was of moment that, before the external blow of judgment fell, the faithful in Palestine should learn what they had been too slow to apprehend. Jesus is not only the Saviour and the Lord, but the great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, and to this end both Son of God in the supreme sense, owned as God and as Jehovah by Him Who is God and Jehovah, and thus as both divine and human in one person seated at God's right hand on His throne where no creature ever did or can sit.

Hence the Epistle starts with Christ in that glorious condition; and we know who it was that saw this great sight to his conversion from Judaism as well as sin — who it is that above every other even of inspired men was given to seize and preach and write down permanently the great truth of a Christ known no longer after the flesh, but dead, risen and exalted in heaven; who accordingly writes death on all that flesh and even religious flesh gloried in, that he and we might find life, righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption, in a word all we and all that God wills us to possess in Christ at His right hand. We are thus heavenly, as is the Heavenly; and have the assurance of safe keeping and ultimate triumph over every foe; for as we have borne the image of the earthly (Adam's), we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly (Christ's).

This was the apostle's great ministry of the church, and thus he was enabled by the Holy Spirit to fill up the word of God, even that blank which was left for the revelation of the mystery that had been hid from all ages and generations. Here it is circumscribed, no doubt, as was necessary because of the infantine state of the believing Jews, who little suspected that their adhesion

to the old things, and mingling them with the new, hindered progress more than aught else could. Hence the aim of the Epistle is to show the substance, force, and perfection of all the ancient forms in the truth of Christ's person and office, work and position, thus raising the Jews who believed to heaven in faith, affection, worship, service, and hope, and making it easy and even happy for them to see the old covenant passing away, the Aaronic priesthood giving place to a better, and earthly sacrifices of no account, yea of exceeding peril if they became rivals of that finished work by which the faithful have been and are sanctified, and perfected in perpetuity, as surely as Christ sat down in perpetuity at God's right hand.

Thus again "the camp," once the place so favoured of God's people, is a place for the Christian Jew to leave. For the blood of atonement has been carried into the holiest for us, and He Who shed it suffered "without the gate." Our place therefore is now within the holiest before God, and without the camp before man; for it is effectively and ought to be only with Christ in both. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness for the entering into the holies by the blood of Jesus, a new and living way, which he inaugurated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us approach with true heart in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from an evil conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22). But let us not forget the other side and present duty: "Let us go forth unto him without the camp bearing his reproach; for here we have not an abiding city, but we seek after the coming one" (Heb. 13:13, 14).

It is impossible to conceive anything equal to this Epistle, whether in the most winning approach to the Jewish Christians where they were, or in the no less admirable deliverance from the ritual yoke, by the proof from God's word that Christianity alone yields the true and intended and complete meaning of all they had been well-nigh idolising in the letter.

It ought not to surprise any that scripture has settled the authorship of the Epistle; and this not by men reasoning on the reference to imprisonment and release in Italy, and the relationship to Timothy, but by a sufficiently determinate statement of Peter in his Second Epistle, addressed as we know it is to the elect Jews of the dispersion (cf. 1 Peter 1:1, 2; and 2 Peter 3:1), as the Epistle to the Hebrews contemplates those in the land. In either case believing Jews are contemplated. What then can be plainer than the apostle Peter's word? "Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you; as also in all epistles speaking in them of these things" (2 Peter 3:15, 16). Now this Epistle repeatedly speaks of the day of the Lord, with some things as usual hard, especially for Jewish minds, to understand, as in 9, 10, 12. Thus it is certain that Paul as well as Peter wrote to the Hebrew Christians; and that these are spoken of as "scriptures" by implication in the words that follow. Either then the Epistle to the Hebrews is what Paul wrote to them — or that portion of the "scriptures" is lost. It has been shown already that the scope of truth is eminently that of Paul; and the peculiarity of his task to any reflecting mind would readily account for an elaborate handling of types, most desirable for Jews but out of place in his writing to Gentile saints.

The contents and connection of the Epistle are plainly defined; which from its nature is less coloured with personalia than the other letters of the writer. The personal glory of the Lord Jesus is the basis of all, Heb. 1 Son of God, Heb. 2 Son of man. Thence follows in Heb. 3 the superiority of the Apostle and High Priest of the Christian confession to Moses and Aaron. He was the divine Builder of all, Son over God's house, Moses being but a ministering servant, though faithful. And this introduces the wilderness as the scene through which we are tried, with promise of entering into God's rest — glory at Christ's return. Hence not only is God's word needed by us, but a great high priest able to sympathise with our infirmities, as in Heb. 4. This leads in Heb. 5: to the contrast of Christ's priesthood, God's Son according to the order of Melchizedek, with that of Aaron taken from among men, and able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself was clothed with infirmity, and was bound to offer for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

But here the apostle turns aside, as his manner is, to lay bare the hindrance through Jewish elements, still pertinaciously clung to, yet incompatible with the everlasting and heavenly things which suit our relation to that great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens and set Himself in a seat so glorious. The word of the beginning of Christ, however good, is quite insufficient; and the Christian must go on to full growth (Heb. 6); for as it is expressed elsewhere, we are no longer under law, suited and given as it was to man in flesh, but under grace, as should be self-evident. How else could we be heavenly, as is the Heavenly? Sovereign grace, reigning through righteousness, alone accounts

for it. And hence the danger of going back from the heavenly privileges now revealed to those elements which are nailed to the cross and vanished away to faith in the light of Christ on high: a danger to which none were so exposed as Hebrews. He therefore desires that each might show diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, having God's oath as well as word with a forerunner in Christ within the veil.

Heb. 7 proves how immeasurably and in all respects the priesthood of Jesus, the Son of God, surpasses that of Aaron bound up as it was with the law which made nothing perfect. The ancient oracles which fully prepare for it intimate also a new and better covenant (Heb. 8), before which the first grows old and ready to vanish away, instead of possessing that immutability with which rabbinical pride and imagination clothed it. And this leads to the great truth of sacrifice according to God's mind and will (Heb. 9, 10), which has found alone its adequate force in the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless to God. Therefore its unity is insisted on, as its completeness is attested by His sitting in perpetuity on God's right hand, the work finished, and those that are sanctified perfected, not merely for ever but in perpetuity or without break also, by that one offering. Here too the warning of abandoning for sin such a sacrifice is solemnly rendered, while it is allowed that we have need of patience in faith, till Jesus come.

This is followed (Heb. 11) by the striking roll of Gods worthies, all being testified of for their faith, before the law and during it, culminating in Jesus the Leader and Completer of faith, Who, infinitely above all in person, suffered immeasurably more and differently, and is alone

now in commensurate glory at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12). And here is beautifully shown that for believers suffering flows from His love as the Father of our spirits, and not now of a nation. Our standing is in His grace, not the law of Sinai; and we are come in faith to the glorious results anticipated for heaven and earth, as the kingdom will display when at His appearing He will cause not the earth only but the heaven to tremble and shake.

Brotherly love, hospitality, and compassion are urged, with the sanctity of marriage, and freedom from avarice through trust in the Lord (Heb. 13). Departed leaders are to be remembered, as living ones to be obeyed. Jesus abides the same. Serving the tabernacle has no more value: all is found in Him, His work, and His offices. “Let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” Such is Christianity as here shown from divinely handled Jewish types and Old Testament teaching. Prayer for the writer and those with him is asked, as he beseeches of the Lord peace for them, saluting all their leaders and all the saints.

Hebrews 1

The opening words are worthy of the great theme. In Christ only is the perfection of all that Israel gloried in. Every other person and office, every other walk or object, honoured in God's living oracles, had it most of all in and for preparing the way for Him. He is the one comprehensive aim of the Holy Spirit, open or understood, positively or negatively by contrast, throughout scripture.

Here that which was comparatively obscure of old is set in the light; for Christ is the true light. It is He who, once dimly discerned, now stands fully revealed, and thus illumines what once seemed dark, what without Him is and must be dark indeed still. Thus is all scripture knit together into one whole. There is the Old Testament; there is also what is called the New Testament, even if the Spirit avoid so characterising it. Together they constitute the Bible, whose unity turns on Christ, once promised, now come and, after accomplishing His work on earth, exalted at God's right hand in heaven. It is above all God revealed in the Son.

Hence it will be apparent, when once pointed out, why this Epistle does not unfold the mystery of Christ; for this would involve the introduction of what was absolutely unknown to Israel, yea, not then revealed by God. The revelation of the mystery supposes the rejection of the people of God, to make way for an entirely new and distinct purpose where a Jew as such is no more than a Gentile; and the church of God becomes the absorbing scene of the Holy Spirit's operation to the present exclusion of Israel. The church therefore in its

full character implies a break in God's dealings with His ancient people, not merely because of idolatry which let in the times of the Gentiles, but because of the rejection and cross of the Messiah, His only-begotten Son, which let in the new and heavenly purpose of God in the church, Christ's body.

Here it is rather the continuity of divine testimony culminating in Christ, Who has laid in His blood and death the unchangeable basis for everlasting blessing, and gives the most glorious expression to its character in His own session as man on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. For this reason, from the first chapter to the last of this Epistle to the Hebrews, we have the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets cited more fully than in any other part of the N.T. So also the ritualistic services, the vessels, and the holy places are turned to direct account in an elaborate way; and the persons whom the Holy Spirit could employ from the beginning are either detailed or taken in the gross (Heb. 11) till we are brought to Christ, the crown and fulness of all. With this will be found to agree the particulars, which we now proceed to consider.

"In many measures and in many manners God, having spoken of old to the fathers in the prophets, spoke to us at [the] end of these days in a Son."

The words that compose this grand exordium are most pregnant, as well as undeniable truth. They briefly, yet distinctly, convey the character of the O.T. communications. It was not in their nature to be complete or final. They were essentially piecemeal. No doubt the prophets wrought "at sundry times," and the modes in which God dealt were "divers": but neither

phrase of the A.V. conveys the force of πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως. The common translation is borrowed from the Version of Geneva in 1539. Wiclif, in this not faithful to the Vulgate, had dropped altogether the first words, though he rightly gave “in many manners.” Tyndale and Cranmer unite in “diversly and many wayes,” as does the Rhemish with a chance in the order. “In time past,” or “of old,” πάλαι, is the sole expression of time. It was the same God and the same Christ; yet the object is to prove an immense change of His dealing: God speaking in a Son, after having spoken to the fathers in the prophets; also Christ no longer connected with the earth but in heavenly glory. Then He spoke “in many parts.” His word was but fragmentary, perfect in its object, but in no wise that fulness which it was in His purpose to bestow when the due moment arrived. As a variety of persons were employed in that work, so “many ways” or methods of revealing, as open speaking to Moses, but visions, and dreams ordinarily. “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets. And by a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved” (Hosea 12:10, 13).

How mighty the advance now! God, though He be not here revealed in the elevation and intimacy of the Father, “spoke to us at the end of these days in a Son.” The apostle in no way dissociates himself from the chosen nation, though he takes care throughout to show that only the Israel of God the true believing remnant, have valid title. But writing to those who were dull to appreciate that which was absolutely new and above this creation, he gives full weight to all previous revelations, however partial and short of what was now

come. not only does he record the honour from God put on “the fathers,” but ranges himself with their sons, as among the “us” to whom His word had now come in a completeness beyond all given before.

“In these last years” (as Tyndale began, followed by all the Protestant English) is too vague a rendering, and apt to be confounded with the different phraseology of 2 Peter 3, Jude 18, or even the more distant phrases in 1 Tim. 4 and in 2 Tim. 3. Still more objectionable is the Rhemish text following the Vulgate. Wiclif is nearer the mark, “at the last in these daies,” though not quite right. “At [the] end,” or [the] last of these days is the literal and true force, the close of these days of the age under the law, when the Messiah comes.

God who spoke to the fathers in past days spoke to us at the last of these days in a Son. The omission of the article has to do neither with the preposition going before nor with emphatic position, as many learned men have said. That there was intention is obvious; for ἐν τοῖς προφ. would naturally call for ἐν τῳ υἱῳ. Yet the phrase is anarthrous, and therefore does not present the person as an object before the mind, but brings character into prominence. The prophets were, like Moses, only servants; He in whom God spoke at the end of these days was Son. Compare Heb. 5:8, etc. Such was the quality, such the relationship to Himself, of the One in Whom He now spoke. Our language does not so well bear the absence of the article; but it is regular in Greek, and at once the most forcible and the most accurate form of expressing character, which is precisely what was wanted here. Not in the prophets any longer, nor in angelic guise as often, but as Son God spoke now.

This adds a fresh reason why a man's name, however blessed or in whatever a position, would be unsuitable; and we have already shown grounds why the author in divinely given wisdom and grace preferred his name in particular not to appear, though the character of the truth and the final notices ought to leave no doubt who he was, without any external voucher, inspired or not. This is much confirmed by the next chapter (verses 3, 4), where our Lord Himself is introduced, the Prophet that should and did come, though Son. The apostles themselves, the twelve, were but His hearers, God joining in the attestation both with signs and wonders and divers powers, and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. How out of place would have been the introduction of his own apostolate! The Son of God, the Christ, had deigned to be the Apostle of our confession (Heb. 3:1).

Was there aught in this justly to offend the warmest love and reverence for the O.T.? Rather does the O.T. bear it out and even require it to seal its own truth. For Law and Prophets bear their consenting witness that One would come, even a prophet like unto Moses, only greater as he himself testifies; who should speak in God's name, but so that whosoever would not hearken must bear the penalty from God. Then should be made on God's part a new covenant, not according to the former one when they were brought out of Egypt — a covenant which they broke no less than they idolised it; but a new one marked by God's grace and power, as the former one was by man's responsibility and total failure.

This Epistle proves that the Blesser is come, if not yet all the blessing, and appropriately opens with God's speaking in the Son. His silence after Malachi made it

all the more impressive, since that last messenger of Jehovah sealed the O.T. canon. Then the interval of four hundred years, not without marked and varied premonitory signs, is closed by a prophet and more than a prophet in John the Baptist, disclaiming to be more than a “voice,” yet proclaiming One standing in their midst whom they knew not, whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose, the Lamb of God, who baptises with the Holy Spirit. “This is the Son of God.”

With the same truth we start here. God speaking was no new thing; for He had in many parts and in many ways. Now there was no limit; for it was in a Son Only-begotten, full of grace and truth. It was therefore no mere assemblage of revelations from God, divine but partial and suited to the instruments and the circumstances; it was God revealing Himself. His Son was the sole competent One for this purpose. In the beginning of the Epistle it is God so speaking when He was on earth; toward the close it is He that speaks from heaven (Heb. 12:25). Everywhere it is God revealed, and not merely communications from Him. This therefore gives the utmost force and impressiveness and authority in the last resort to every subject that is handled, especially to that change which it is the main object of the Epistle to make known. “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of law” (Heb. 7:12).

The immeasurable superiority of Christ, and consequently of Christianity, comes out in this respect at the starting-point, and the more strikingly, because no Christian questions the divine inspiration of all the ancient oracles. Yet every true Christian feels the different and surpassing character, not only of Christ’s

words in the Gospels, but of the apostolic writings and the N.T. as a whole. It is truly Christ speaking in them all; it is God revealing Himself in Him as Son, with an intimacy peculiar to Him alone and in all its perfectness. And this superiority we may see running through the entire Epistle. He is above all men and angels; He is God and Jehovah, seated though man where no creature could be. He is the true captain of salvation, not Joshua. He is far above Moses the apostle of the Jewish confession, far beyond Aaron the Levitical high priest, more than filling up the wonderful picture of Melchizedek too. And no wonder; for Moses and Aaron were but servants in that house of which He was the builder, as indeed of all things. They were all brought into, being by Him, and without Him was not one thing brought into being of the created universe.

Nor is it only above all persons and offices that we see Jesus; but He alone gives a fuller and more divine meaning to every institution God set up in Israel. Take covenant in Heb. 8; and sanctuary, sacrifice, and offering in Heb. 9, 10. Everywhere His incontestable superiority is no less apparent; so as in Christianity at least to involve and prepare the way for their passing away, as the shadows and signs of that substance which now abides in all its preciousness to God, in all its efficacy for the believer.

If we look at faith, on which in every way the N.T. lays the utmost stress, others of old may and do show its beautifully refracted colours; but away from so great a cloud of witnesses we must look stedfastly on Jesus if we would see the Leader and Completer of faith. He is the full and pure light of it all. Therefore are we come in spirit even now to such an assemblage of glories (Heb.

12:18-24) as not only eclipses but contrasts with the earthly and terror-inspiring associations of Sinai, whence dates the national distinction of Israel as God's people on the footing of the law. It is ours, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, to have grace whereby let us serve acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Others, however to be remembered and imitated in their faith, pass; but another blessed superiority is that Jesus Christ, God and man now glorified, is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. And He defines our place with Him both before God and man: within the veil through His blood, without the camp bearing His reproach. What God has joined, let not man's unbelief and selfishness sunder. The force of this for the Jewish Christian was immense: do we now make them both good in our souls and ways?

It is the voice of the Christ all through if on earth to gain the ear of the remnant and attach them to Himself, to God in a Son; in heaven to detach from all the earthly elements of Judaism which had done for the faithless their worst in becoming a rival through Satan's wiles, their best in spelling His name who is all and in all them that believe. And here is another superiority which we shall trace in detail, that what He gives us is in each case declared to be "eternal," in contrast with the temporary good things of Israel. He is the author of "eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). He has found an "eternal redemption," and we receive the promise of the "eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9), even as He by the "eternal Spirit" offered Himself without spot to God, and the covenant consequently is "eternal" (Heb. 13).

The personal glory of Christ, Son of God, and His work as profound as His dignity is of high account for all,

when we see Him to reveal God and give effect to His grace beyond all thought of man. This would, if anything could, draw Jews out of Judaism, when made willing to grow by the knowledge of God. And this we shall find to be the practical gist of our Epistle from first to last; nor was any so suited for the work as Saul of Tarsus, nor any time so seasonable as before Jerusalem was swept away, and the temple with its priesthood and sacrifices came to an open end as already defunct.

The peculiar form of the phrase then “in a Son,” difficult without loss or a paraphrase to convey adequately in our language, is simply to characterise the relationship, not who but what, as in Matt. 4:6, Matt. 9:29, Matt. 27:40, 43, 54; Luke 4:3; John 1:1 (last clause θεὸς), John 5:27, John 8:54, John 10:33, 36, John 19:7; as well as in Heb. 3:6, Heb. 5:8, Heb. 7:8, 28. Where the person is the object before us, the article is invariably inserted, as may be seen in the context of these texts and in Scripture generally. “In the person of the, or His, Son,” or”‘ in Him who is Son,” would therefore require ἐν τῳ υἱῳ. A subordinate sense where the article is absent is in no way the truth, in the mind either of’ friends or of foes. Where character is predicated, the article is excluded as here. Only in English we must say “a” or “the,” which so far enfeebles the expression of what is here intended: “a” as capable of implying others, which is not at all meant but the reverse; “the” as presenting Christ objectively, where is meant predicatively that character of intimate relationship to God which is proper to Him only in eternal title and right. Some only have it subordinately by creation, as angels; others again, as the faithful, by sovereign grace through faith in Christ and eternal life in the Son.

Next comes His heirship. “Whom he constituted heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds”:1 testimonies to the glory of Christ of exceeding moment, to which we shall return after citing the passage in full. “Who being the effulgence of his glory and the very impress of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, become so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a name more excellent than they” (verses 2-4).

As in Rom. 9 to Gentile saints, so here to Jewish, the apostle proves that Christianity reveals the Messiah in a grandeur far surpassing the imagination of the former or the tradition of the latter. He is Son as none else. He is Heir of the universe; and no wonder. For as He created the worlds, so He upholds all things by the word of His power. Yes, the very Man whom they crucified by the hand of lawless men, who was crucified through weakness! At the moment He bowed His head and expired, He was sustaining all creation. It were absurd to think or say so, had He been only man; but He was God; and the dissolution of the tie between the outer and the inner man in no way touched His almighty power.

Jesus then is not merely the Messianic Heir of the nations as in Psalm 2. He is the Heir of all things as He created all. Compare John 1:3. All things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, are to be summed or headed up in Christ: such is God’s good pleasure which He purposed in Him (Eph. 1:9, 10). He is exalted accordingly to the highest seat, the pledge of all that is to follow for now we see not yet all things subjected to Him, but we behold Himself crowned with glory and

honour. And we know from elsewhere why He does not yet enter on the immense and glorious inheritance. He awaits the calling out of all the joint-heirs whom He will invest with the inheritance at the same time as He takes it Himself; for if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Such are the wondrous counsels of God, through his Son and to His glory, both before the world for a while, and afterward for ever.

He, Who is the appointed inheritor of the universe, and also fully entitled as being the Creator of the worlds, is yet more set forth in verse 3: being the effulgence of God's glory and the very impress of His substance or being, and upholding all things by the word of His power. He is in the highest sense (as intrinsically there can be none other) a divine person no less than the Father, and the Holy Spirit. But He is specially the displayer of Godhead, as in power and providence so in goodness, and in grace even to the lost. Compare 2 Cor. 4:4 and Col. 1:15. And this comes into the utmost prominence in the words that follow: "having made," or when He made, "purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"; where we may observe that, even omitting "by Himself" with the oldest uncials and good versions, etc., the participle carries in itself the remarkable force of having done it for Himself. He took His seat on high on the accomplishment of His work for the purification of sins. For this He had come as being the will of God, and only goes on high to take that place of glory when He had Himself done the work, whereby believers were to be blessed.

It will be observed that Christ is said here to be the outshining of God's glory. In our Epistle it is not the Father (as in John), but God. Both are true and each has

its own importance. And it is scarcely needful to say that “person,” borrowed in the A.V. from that of Geneva, is a mistake. It is “substance” or essential being, as in Wiclif, Tyndale, Cranmer, and the Rhemish from the Vulgate. The doctrine of course is one hypostasis and three persons, as is commonly known: both truths are made evident in Isa. 6 compared with John 12 and Acts 28, as indeed by many other scriptures.

Christ’s maintenance of the universe presents His divine glory in a striking way. “By Him all things consist,” as the apostle affirms in Col. 1. They were created by Him and for Him, and they subsist together in virtue of Him. This becomes all the more remarkable because He deigned for the deepest purposes to become true man. This, however, trenched not on His deity; for the incarnation means not Godhead swamped by humanity, but this taken into everlasting union with itself, each nature abiding in its own perfectness, not metamorphosed but constituting together the one person of Christ. As He therefore brought all into being, so does He sustain all the universe, and ever did so.

There is another and profounder element of His glory, His effecting in His own person the purgation of sins. To create needed but His word; to sustain, His will; but not so redemption. To command in this case would have been wholly insufficient. The purging of sins could not be without the shedding of blood, without sacrificial death, for which the O.T. prepared men from the beginning. The earthly sacrifices could neither suffice for God’s glory, nor cleanse man’s conscience, as we are taught fully later on. But they were weighty testimonies from the days. of Adam downward, though only elaborated into a system of types most full and

instructive by divine inspiration under Moses. Christ's was indeed "A sacrifice of nobler name, And richer blood than they."

Christ alone gives the full meaning and the true dignity to sacrifice, as is here briefly shown and bound up with the glory of His person. Sin is rebellion against God; it is lawlessness. God therefore is the One invariably concerned, whether it be also a human wrong or not. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight ": yet he who so cried had been guilty of blood as well as of the worst corruption. As God's majesty and character are thus intimately in question, it is He who undertook to settle all in His Son. But here nothing less could avail than His death, yea, death of the cross, where God Himself laid the sins on the spotless Victim's head (Isa. 53) that they might thus be borne, and borne away. Not otherwise could there be forgiveness of sins according to God. There must be the purification of sins; and it is the "blood of Jesus Christ His Son" that "cleanseth from all sin," from every sin.

No wonder this deepest work of God is treated here as part of the divine glory of Christ. He must be man on behalf of men, He must be God to be available with God; He is both in one person; and thus as the justification was thus perfect, the result is unfailing for all who believe. Once cleansed thereby the worshippers have no more conscience of sins; and He, having offered one sacrifice for sins, "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high," sat down in perpetuity, as Heb. 10:12 tells us, not only for ever but without a break in the efficacy of His sacrifice. How could it be otherwise if God in a Son undertook that work? And as this is thoroughly reasoned out and applied in the latter part of

the Epistle, here we have the great truth stated clearly at the start: a truth “hard to be understood,” by a Jew particularly, accustomed as he was to the routine and repetition of sacrifice as well as of all other Levitical observances. But the Holy Spirit of God does not keep it back, giving it a foremost place in the introduction.

It was scarce needed to say that Christ “by Himself” made purification of sins. For He alone suffered for sins — He alone was sacrificed for us. The Father had His will in giving Him for the purpose; and the Holy Spirit bears testimony to the complete efficacy, as He previously held out types and predictions and promises. But it was for Christ alone to suffer for sin; and this He did to the uttermost. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.... It pleased Jehovah to bruise him; He hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,” etc. “He poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bare the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53).

And this is the basis of what the apostle elsewhere calls the “righteousness of God,” that righteousness, not of man which the law sought yet found not in the sinful, but of God Who in virtue of Christ’s propitiation can fully bless all that believe, and freely plead with and call on all men as they are. The purification of sins effected by a divine person is not limited and cannot fail; but it necessarily can take effect on none that hear the gospel unless they believe: God would be consenting to the

dishonour of the Son if He made light of men's unbelief. Besides, the word received in faith has a morally cleansing power, as all believers are born of water and the Spirit. But here it is the work, not in man but efficacious before God, which occupies the apostle; and this is the purification of sins by Christ before He sat down at God's right hand.

What an attestation is that seat of His to the perfection and completeness of the work He undertook! When Jehovah laid our sins on Christ, He was made sin for us, and treated as it deserved at the hand of God. For what did man, or even saints, know then of that infinite task? God indeed marked it by a darkness for which nothing in nature can account, and Christ confessed it in that cry of His inapplicable to all others but Himself: "My God, My God, why didst thou forsake Me?" This was the necessary accompaniment of sin-bearing: absolute abandonment by God. Though He were His God, yet Christ was made sin; and it was no make-believe but real if anything ever was; no slurring over the least sin, no leaving out the greatest. It was Christ bearing the judgment of sin, the sole righteous way for the purification of sins. And the work was done and finished in such perfectness, that the only adequate seat for Him who had borne all was at the right hand of the Majesty on high. David's throne will be taken another day when blessing dawns for the earth on Israel. And when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the angers with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all the nations. But here is a seat incomparably more august, and in fact proper and possible to none but a divine person. yet is it also presented as the place suited to Him who had just

made purification of sins. In this He suffered and wrought; on that He sat down, the work completed and thus accepted. What more glorious for the humbled Messiah? What more blessed in its fruit for the believer? A sacrifice to God, He gave Himself up for us.

There is another word added here, the bearing of which is no less evident on Jewish minds. They thought much of angelic glory. The law they received as ordained by ministry of angels (Acts 7:50; Gal. 3:19). They were wont therefore to regard with awe and wonder those obedient messengers of God's power, of which there can be no stronger proof than John's temptation in Rev. 19, 22. Hence the gravity of the further testimony to Christ's glory here, "made so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a name more excellent than they" (ver. 4).

It is Christ who renders evident the ground of God's counsel to raise from among men those destined to a place incomparably higher than that of angels. If the Son of God became man, it was at once intelligible, becoming, and necessary. And the redemption that is in Christ, and our consequent nearness of relationship into which grace brings the believer, make plain our association with Him and our elevation above angels. For they *are not called but kept. Not sunk into moral ruin, they have no experience of the mercy that saves and unites with Christ. Hence angels are never said to reign. They serve, instead of sitting on thrones. We are to reign with Him, yet shall we serve then as we serve now, and all the better through grace, because, delivered from the lowest estate of guilt and evil, we are objects of His ceaseless and infinite love, and shall share His glory as surely as we now rest on His grace. Angels know not either extreme, as we do; but all we boast is

through Him who became so much better than the angels as He hath an inheritance more excellent than they. It is the Messiah of whom we are hearing.

Next comes a series of quotations from the O.T. pertinent to the Sonship of Christ just laid down. This fulness of citing the ancient oracles, though found elsewhere in the apostle's writings and conspicuously in the Epistle to the Romans, is nowhere so rich as here. Nor could we well conceive it otherwise, if he were writing to believers from among the chosen people, and anxious in his loving consideration for them to rest all on God's word, already known to them familiarly, rather than on his own fresh prophetic communications.

"For to whom of the angels did he ever say, My Son art Thou: I this day have begotten Thee? And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstborn into the habitable earth, he saith, And let all God's angels worship him. And indeed as to the angels he saith, "Who maketh his angels winds and his ministers a flame of fire; but as to the Son, Thy throne, O God, [is] unto the age of the age, and a sceptre of uprightness [is] the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou lovedst righteousness and hatedst lawlessness: therefore God, thy God, anointed thee with oil of gladness above thy fellows" (vers. 5-9).

As Jews they were accustomed to think much of angels, who were seen often on critical occasions by the fathers, and took a most distinguished part in bringing in the law, as well as in heralding or accomplishing, deliverances afterwards, as everyone can see who reads the Law and the Prophets with attention. This tended to produce no small veneration in the minds of the just,

and superstition too in such as went beyond Scripture. Christ alone gives and keeps the truth in us by grace. And here we have a clear instance in point, as throughout the Epistle. Not only was the Life the light of men rather than of angels, but the Son of God becoming man really, as He had often anticipatively intervened in human guise, gave proof that the good pleasure of God is in men, and prepared the way for the revelation of the glorious counsels He has ever had for such as believe, in the day of Christ, when even angels are to be in a subordinate place as indeed throughout eternity. This assuredly could not be without redemption, as redemption in the full sense could not be without incarnation, supposed in Heb. 1 and openly stated in Heb. 2, as we shall see. As the Son is incontestably above the prophets, so is He now proved far above the angels and He is the foundation of all our blessedness.

The first scripture quoted is from Psalm 2:7: “My Son art thou: - I this day have begotten thee.” Never was such a word addressed to an angel. It applies only to Christ. But how? The apostle John loves to expatiate on His eternal Sonship. Again, elsewhere in the epistles of Paul He is often shown as Son of God in resurrection (Rom. 1:4, Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18), as of course also when He returns from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10). How is He regarded here? As Son of God born in time: so we see Him in Luke 1:32 and yet more definitely in verse 35. The assumption of flesh in no way lowered His Sonship: Son of God eternally, He was still and no less Son of God when born of the Virgin, as He is in resurrection and evermore in glory; He only, and in virtue of divine right acknowledged of God, and to Jesus solely by the word magnified above all Jehovah’s name.

It is the more important that this should be seen clearly and irrefragably, because even the learned Bishop Pearson, in his famous work on the Creed, over and over again gives countenance to the mystic view 2 of this verse of the Psalm cited in Acts 13:32, 33, as if the apostle had so definitely ruled. But this is quite an oversight. On the contrary, and beyond controversy, the apostle distinguishes in verse 34 the Lord's resurrection (attested by Isa. 55:3 and Psalm 16:10) from His Sonship in the days of His flesh as in Psalm 2:7. The raising up" (not "up again," as in A.V.) in 32, 33, is as Messiah on earth; with which is contra-distinguished in 34 God's raising Him up from the dead.

Hence there is no need or even room for swerving from the simple yet grand truth that, as the Psalmist, so the apostle, in preaching at Antioch of Pisidia and here in writing to the Christian Jews, speaks of what Jehovah said of His Son when born a man. It is therefore His birth in time: "I this day have begotten thee." But it is of all moment for the truth and His own personal dignity, to remember that His Sonship when incarnate as well as in resurrection is based on His eternal relationship as Son, the great theme of the apostle John, without which the other two could not have been. Here too many Christians have fallen short.

The next citation appears to be from 1 Chron. 17:13 (2 Sam. 7, where the same words occur, being more historical): "I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son." This is the assertion of the perfect and mutual affection that reigned between the Father and His Son, now a living man; not what became an accomplished fact as in Psalm 2:7, and what should

subsist when He was born of woman, “Son of David, Son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1).

As to the second text there has been little discussion among orthodox men. Not so in the third, which stands in our Epistle identical with the Vatican (not the Alexandrian) Septuagintal text of Deut. 32:43, and in substance with Psalm 97:7). But it has been keenly urged as to the prefatory words that “again” (πάλιν) belongs to εἰσαγάγῃ, and denotes a new and second introduction of the Messiah, instead of being as in the A.V. and many others the mark of another citation. Not a few ancients, mediaevals, and moderns have so understood, though they differ widely as to the alleged second introduction. But the Pesch. Syr. found no such difficulty as the Vulgate; nor did Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Beza, Bengel, Wolf, any more than the fullest of modern commentators, Bleek. It is assumed that πάλιν would not stand where it is in the Greek if it introduced another citation; yet the good scholar who so speaks allows that in point of interpretation the rendering of the A.V. is much to be preferred! Is this really safe? That a false version yields better sense than the true? That the true is not justifiable grammatically?

The fact is that the collocation stands alone, as far as I can see, in the N.T., and that there is nothing either way in the LXX. Now in the other instances of the N.T. there is no case precisely like this before us, not only no o{tan de;, but nothing analogous. I do not admit (until a real case is produced adverse to what is confessed by a candid and competent man, Canon Humphry, to be a much preferable resulting, sense) that we are driven to deny an elasticity to the Greek, of which our tongue is perfectly susceptible. Englishmen are certainly not tied

down to such an order, as “Again, when he bringeth in.” What proof is there that the far more pliant Greek is more restricted? Not infrequently there are solitary examples of collocation or construction even in the N.T. as in other writings. If we may say, “And when, again, he bringeth in,” etc., I know not why the writer may not with equal liberty have adopted a corresponding order, even though there be no other instance of or call for such a variety.

What then is the grammatical principle or the usage which is supposed to be traversed here? “In this epistle, when it is joined to a verb, it has always the sense of a second time, e.g. Heb. 4:7, Heb. 5:12, Heb. 6:1, 6.” Is it not unfortunate that the very first is adverse? It is no more joined to a verb there than in the verse debated. It means “Again, he limiteth,” not “He limiteth a second time.” No one doubts that in verse 12, like 6:1, 6, it means iterum (not rursus, particularly when used as a sort of parenthesis, as in Heb. 1 and often elsewhere). Indeed, the very first occurrence in the N.T. refuses this imaginary canon of grammar. Our Lord said (Matt. 5:33) πάλιν ἠκούσατε, of which the unequivocal and universally allowed sense is, again, ye heard, and not, because a verb follows, Ye heard a second time. To say “joined to a verb” begs the question. Is it really so? We may be assured it may not be.

The fact is that the apostle’s object appears to be, not defining time when God ushers the Firstborn into the world, but (whenever it shall have been, past or future perhaps) proving the universal homage of all God’s angels to the glory of the Son. And surely Luke 2:13, 14 is a beautiful witness to it. Nor is there the smallest ground to limit “the firstborn” to resurrection. As any

reader may see, Col. 1:15 points out the Lord Jesus as the Firstborn of all creation, quite distinctly from His subsequent and still more glorious position of Firstborn from the dead" in verse 18 (cf. Rev. 1:5). "Firstborn as such is therefore more suitable to Him simply as incarnate; which tells, as far as it goes, against construing π. with the verb as "a second time." At the same time it is frankly allowed that the fulfilment of Deut. 32 or of Psalm 97 as a whole awaits the Lord's second advent.

We have, after this, words cited from two psalms, Ps. 104:4 as to the angels, which no Jew would dispute, and indeed such messengers and servants cannot but be angelic, whatever Calvin may argue to the contrary; Ps. 45:6, 7 as to the Lord Jesus. I have no right to pronounce on the true objects and the true predicates in the Hebrew. But it cannot be doubted that the Epistle to the Hebrews cites from the Sept. as in the Vat., save in the form of the last words; and there the true order admits of no question. So the meaning of the earlier psalm is beyond just controversy. The glorious beings of heaven, its natural denizens, are made to do God's will in providence and to act in wind or flame. But instead of making Christ this or that, He says, Thy throne, O God, is for the age of the age (for ever), and the sceptre of uprightness is sceptre of Thy kingdom.

Here, be it remarked, that it is a question of the time of fulfilment no more than in Deut. 32 (or Psalm 97); for it is very certain that the judicial kingdom described in Psalm 45 is still future, having had no real accomplishment yet. But none the less is the recognition of Messiah's glory most available even now for the object of the Epistle. For God owns the Messiah as no

less than Himself — and, if God, it cannot be a mere question of time, whatever of glorious display may yet be in store.

The past too is not forgotten, nor ever can be by God. “Thou didst love righteousness and didst hate lawlessness.” Such was Jesus as man here below; for in truth He is both in one person, neither more truly God than man, nor man than God. Compare Phil. 2 “Therefore God, thy God, anointed thee with oil of gladness beyond thy fellows.”

How beautiful to see the largeness of grace and truth. After this lofty owning of Messiah as God by God comes the fullest acknowledgment of others. He Himself is no more ashamed to own us His companions or fellows than God is to own Him God. He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one. Yet He is God no less than the Father, Who will have all men honour the Son even as]Himself. What have infidel dreams of progress to compare with simple and sure Christian truth?

The quotation from Psalm 45 was most distinct and conclusive. No Jew then, if now, could doubt that the psalm refers throughout to the Messiah introducing and maintaining His kingdom on earth in association with the godly Jewish remnant. Christ is seen as King, not Head of the church (though godly Jews are now anointed as His partners, before He appears in His royal glory). But the one object for which it is cited is to prove that God recognises the Messiah as God. It is not men only nor angels, nor Jews nor Gentiles. It, is “God,” the divine title, not of special earthly relationship, but of essential nature in contrast with the creature. What an answer to reproach and rejection!

It might be supposed impossible to find any ascription beyond this in honour of Christ; but it is not so: the next witness exceeds. Here is another and higher testimony to the Son from the fourth book of Psalms (Ps. 102:25-27): “And, thou in the beginning, Lord, didst found the earth, and the heavens are works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou continuest; and they all shall grow old as a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou roll them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (verses 10-12).

The “And” simply connects this fresh quotation with the former as said to the Son. But the divine title differs. It is the name which every Jew owns as incommunicable and supreme. “God” may be used subordinately in peculiar circumstances of those who represent His authority as kings or judges. Compare Ex. 21, 22; Psalm 82. But Jehovah, in the LXX., translated “LORD as here used, is never applied otherwise than to God in the highest sense, and this in special or covenant character of relationship with Israel as the Everlasting and Immutable. It is therefore anarthrous.

The force of this application of the closing words in the psalm is immense. It is Jehovah’s answer to the prayer of the afflicted, the humbled, cast off, and suffering Messiah, and especially to His petition in verse 24. No language can more thoroughly show Him man when overwhelmed and pouring out complaint before Jehovah, yet the Holy One of God, so born and so sustained under unparalleled temptations in unbroken dependence and obedience. In verses 1-11 Messiah spreads out His distress, His heart smitten like grass, His enemies’ reproach, Himself taken up and cast down because of Jehovah’s indignation and wrath — certainly not against

Him but for Israel's sake — so that His days were as a shadow. Then from verse 12 He contrasts Jehovah's permanence and fidelity to His covenant as the security of Zion, whatever her desolations, even in the set time to have pity on her, with the results sure and blessed, not only for the generation to come, but for the peoples and kingdoms and nations in that day of fearing and serving Jehovah. Lastly, in verses 23, 24, He spreads before Jehovah His own strength weakened and His days shortened, and begs not to be taken away in the midst of them, while owning that Jehovah's years are throughout all generations. Thereon follows the glorious answer to the self-emptied and suffering Son: "Of old didst thou lay the foundation," etc. "They shall be changed, but thou art the same," etc.

It is Jehovah from above who thus answers Jehovah below in the midst of His entire submission to sorrow and humiliation "crucified in weakness." Jehovah will arise and build up Zion; and when He does, He will appear in His glory; but Zion shall not be without her humbled and afflicted Messiah, whatever the weakness He bowed under for the glory of God and the deliverance of His people; for the Son is as truly Jehovah as the Father. "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah thy Elohim is one Jehovah." Such is the meaning of Psalm 102, as interpreted by one no less inspired than he who wrote the Psalm. Without Heb. 1 we might not have found it out; with it we at once see that no other interpretation gives adequate meaning to the Psalm. But what a proof of Christ's supreme deity, and this grounded on His possession of the ineffable Name from Him Who has it confessedly! The divine glory of Christ is the answer to all appearances and every dilemma.

If it be argued that the word “Lord” (

κύριε) in the LXX. has no counterpart in the Hebrew, the answer is that the truth meant in no way depends on the insertion of that word, but on the attributes of creative and judicial glory, as well as divine unchangeableness in His changing all creation ascribed to the Messiah by Jehovah. He was man, and crushed to the uttermost, as must be if He made good the errand of grace on which He came — righteously vindicating God in the face of sin and delivering the people on whom lay indignation and wrath; and this He did in suffering weakness, not in power, but He is owned in that suffering as ever the same, the Eternal: not only as having an everlasting kingdom, but as the One who was and who is and who is to come, the Ancient of days albeit Son of man, as John testifies in Rev. 1. We may compare also Dan. 7:13, 22, where the Son of Man, who came to the Ancient of Days, is Himself also identified with the Ancient of Days. So careful is scripture while exhibiting His manhood to mention His deity.

The contrast of perishable creation with the permanence of Christ (really Jehovah) deserves to be weighed. For the assumed perpetuity of the world is a root principle of infidelity, and never more than in the matter worship of modern philosophers, the revival of ancient heathenism. Scripture, on the contrary, insists on the certainty of a God of judgment, and not less physically than morally. All depends on His sovereign and holy will. It is not only that science is obliged to confess divine intervention in creating and destroying (I say not annihilating, for this is false) the earth many times and through many periods, ever so long between its original call into being, and its being made the dwelling of man.

But since Adam's children lived on it, a judgment both moral and physical has borne witness, however scorners may be willingly ignorant, that God is not indifferent to wickedness breaking through creature bounds; for the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished; as it will surely meet with a more signal doom, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. Now all judgment is committed to the Son. He has executed it, as He will execute it.

Nor is it only that these or those subordinate parts of creation shall perish. But as the earth and the heavens were the works of the Son's hands (John 1:3), so they all shall wax old as a garment. Nor is it from creature's defectibility, but from the Creator's righteous will: "as a mantle shalt Thou roll them up." The unchangeableness of the heavens and of all that is visible or invisible in them is no more true than that of the earth and of all in it that men aver to continue as they were. The astronomers, the geologists, the chemists, the physicists, the physiologists, to speak of no more, are apt to swamp all recognition of the true God in sole occupation with His works, and thus sink into an atheism so much the more guilty, because it is apostasy from the only true Light that revealed Him. Yet not more truly are they to die than they must rise. For the resurrection of Christ gives the pledge of clearance from judgment, yea, of present justification to His own, and of sure judgment to follow for all who despise Him. Christ's resurrection proves the succession of cause and effect to be in fact under God's absolute control — as is true of every real miracle. There will be a grand change to inaugurate Christ's coming; a complete and final one as

the result when the kingdom gives place to all thinks made new for eternity.

This series of quotations closes with words taken from the opening of Psalm ex., which is again Jehovah's utterance to Messiah on His rejection.

"But unto which of the angels hath He said at any time, Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool of thy feet? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to do service for the sake of those that shall inherit salvation?" (verses 13, 14).

Psalm 110 is the more striking as immediately following the psalm which describes the son of perdition, Messiah's betrayer. Here the rejected of Israel and of man is told to take His seat at God's right hand, a fact alluded to or quoted throughout the N.T. perhaps more than any other O.T. statement, unless it be to His sacrifice or His kingdom. Nor need we wonder at this. Christ's present glory is asserted therein. It gives occasion to the bringing in of "the mystery of Christ." It is the starting-point of the gospel in its heavenly character. It explains the enigma of Christ exalted above, whilst rejected outwardly and having nothing of His rights as Yet here below. It equally falls in with the mystery of Israel's eclipse while unbelieving, and with Satan's claim as the god of this age.

No angel was ever invited as He is to sit on that throne. Indeed, though the saints are to sit with Christ on His throne in the age of His display, no angel will ever be. Angels were made to serve, not to reign; they never did, nor will. Dominion was given to Adam, the type of Him that was to come. God ever had the Kingdom in view from the foundation of the world. Of this kingdom Christ

is the destined King. But as He will have in His grace the changed saints to reign with Him, so also He will have saints unchanged set on His right hand and despisers on His left, when He sits on His throne of glory and judges all the nations according to their treatment of His messengers (His brethren) to be sent forth just before He appears again.

Never will the church sit where Christ sits now, nor any member of it, even apostle or prophet. It is peculiar to God Who calls Christ there: because Christ is also God and Jehovah (as we have seen no less than He who sent Him), Christ sits there. During the Apocalyptic period judgments from God fall successively and with increasing intensity on guilty man, especially in Christendom; and at length, when His enemies are set a footstool, Christ personally appears to tread them down. Then when in association with His ancient people, Jehovah sends the rod of His strength out of Zion, and Christ rules in the midst of His foes. But such no longer are the Jews, who once constrained the Gentiles to crucify Him; they offer themselves willingly in the day of His power. He will have then the dew of His youth, the generation to come. “Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children.” Men corrupt themselves more and more, whatever they vaunt of progress. Nevertheless under Christ there will surely be the best wine for the earth kept till then. And then will the blessedness be shown of Jehovah’s oath about the great Melchizedek; for though Christ is so now as to order, only then will it be exercised. He will bring out the bread and the wine for the victors in all their meaning, blessing man on the part of God most high, and blessing God on man’s part. For indeed will it be the good age, and every one and thing

in its due place, which He only can accomplish. No doubt that day will open with wrath, as we know it will close with judgment when time melts into eternity.

But then again the aim of the Spirit is not to open out the coming glory for the earth, but to demonstrate the singular dignity proper to Christ at God's right hand in contrast with angels who at best are all ministering spirits sent forth on service for those that are to inherit salvation. Higher than this they never rise. Christ might and did become David's Son; but He was also David's Lord, as our Lord Himself put the case to the Jews, and unanswerably, because their lips were held fast in unbelief. But faith here answers at once. He was God equally with the Father. Where else then should He sit but at God's right hand? Surely none the less because man or Israel would have none of Him. The first of Israel's royal line, the father (after a long succession then to come) of Him whose is that kingdom everlasting, though yet awaiting it, owns his Son by the strangest reversal of nature as his Lord: a thing unaccountable, unless He were God, the Root as well as Offspring of David. The holy angels are sustained of the Lord. It is ours to know salvation, whether as now seen complete in Christ (as in Eph. 2, etc.) or as completed in us at His coming and therefore future (as here and elsewhere).

1 τοὺς αἰῶνας, in general "the ages," but also beyond just dispute used by Hellenistic Jews for the universe (perhaps as the theatre of the divine dispensations or ages) as here and in Heb. 11:3. See Eccles. 3:11 in the Sept., and elsewhere.

2 "As He was raised from the dead, out of the womb of the earth unto immortal life," etc. (Exposition i. 57,

Oxford, 1797). “The grave is as the womb of the earth: Christ, who is raised from thence, is as it were begotten to another life,” etc. (i. 173). “Upon the morning of the third day did those words of the Father manifest a most important truth, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (i. 400).

Hebrews 2

From the foregoing cluster of O.T. quotations this conclusion is drawn:-

“Therefore we ought to pay the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply [or, ever] we should slip away.3 For if the word spoken through angels proved stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? The which having begun to be spoken through the Lord was confirmed unto us by those that heard, God also bearing witness with [them] both with signs and wonders, and varied powers, and distributions of [the] Holy Spirit according to his own will” (verses 1-4).

The danger set before these Hebrews is of the gravest. They had known the Jews’ religion originally. They had now professed to believe the gospel. Woe to such, above all men, if they slipped away from Christ; for the truth of God and the blessing of man centre only in Him. Christianity and Judaism are as different as heaven from earth; but as the heavenly things are not yet displayed, all enjoyment of them must be by faith of God’s revelation, crowned by the standing facts that Christ is come, has accomplished redemption as far as remission of our sins is concerned, and so glorified God in it, that He has now glorified the Son of man in Himself, the Holy Spirit being already given the believer as unction, seal, and earnest. If the believer look away from Christ, he is like his forefathers in the desert without the living God and nothing but the barren sand. Now a Jew naturally expected a bright path of honour and prosperity on

earth. The cross stumbled him when Messiah came. “We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever; and how sayest thou, that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this, the Son of man?” (John 12:34) If they got occupied with trial and disappointment, not only did murmuring set in but faith was emperilled. And if self-judgment did not work restoration of communion, what could the end be but total drifting away? Where could this end? How could it be otherwise?

God had spoken fully and finally in a Son, the Heir as Creator too of the universe, to whom even the preparatory testimonies of His word bore witness as His Son, God, and Jehovah; whose position after He made purification of sins was unique in heavenly glory, the object of angelic homage according to God’s will and word. The greater His grace and glory, the more solemn the responsibility to heed the testimony. For this only it is as yet: the time is not yet arrived, nor can it be under the gospel, for His power to compel absolute submission, as it will do by-and-by (Phil. 2:10, 11). It is the day for obedience of faith. But the word was nigh them in their mouth and in their heart, the things read as well as heard. To grow light, cool, or listless exposed them to the danger of slipping away, not for the truth only but themselves also. God would not be mocked in His Son and in His grace. To have once owned His glory binds the soul ever to heed His word and person.

Here again angels are introduced as the occasion for a stronger call. “For if the word spoken by angels was made stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglected so great salvation?” (vers. 2, 3).

The Jews were not mistaken in boasting of the singular honour God had put on the law, introduced as it was by angelic ministration. The N.T. is as clear in this attestation as the O.T. Nor were they wrong in maintaining the inviolability of the law in itself. How could its authority waver, if it be as it is, God's law? It is not only in great things, but in small as man would think and say, that we see God vindicating it. Every transgression and every refusal to hear received righteous requital. Other ways of God came in no doubt, whereby mercy could rejoice against judgment; but unsparing judgment of evil was the principle proclaimed and enforced throughout. It was a ministry of death and condemnation.

Incomparably more serious is it to despise grace brought in by the Head of all glory. No notion more contrary to truth than that grace makes light of evil — that the gospel is a sort of mitigated or attenuated law. It was when man, and man under law, was proved wholly bad and irreparably ruined, that God sent His Son and laid on Him the entire burden. Salvation is the fruit for him that believes. There is and can be for sinners no other way. It is entirely Christ's work, exclusively His suffering. His blood cleanses from every sin — if not from all, from none. Such is the grace of God that has appeared in Christ, and especially in His death. But man is the enemy of God through listening to an older and mightier rebel than himself; and grace is far more alien and offensive to man than law. In the law his conscience can but bow to righteousness, even though thinking himself righteous; for he knows and approves what is right, while he follows what is wrong. Grace is beyond all his thoughts, all his feelings, all his hopes, because it

is divine love in God rising above all His hatred of evil, which He lays on the only sacrifice capable of bearing it before Himself and taking it away righteously.

This the gospel proclaims, not promises only but preaches, because the Saviour has come and finished the work given Him to do on behalf of sinners to God's glory. And hence the supreme danger of neglecting so great salvation. For its immensity is proportionate to His dignity who came to save sinners, and to the unparalleled work in suffering at God's hand for all our sins what they deserved. His divine person gave Him competency to endure as well as infinite efficacy for His work. He became indeed man to suffer for man; but He never ceased to be God, even when for sin forsaken by God.

Such is the doctrine here and uniformly in scripture where it is treated. It is a salvation on which the Holy Spirit never wearies of expatiating. And how gracious of God toward those who have His word and yet are in danger of neglecting "so great salvation"! not only neglecting to receive it but negligent of it when professed. This snare of a religious people like Israel is just the danger of Christendom now yet more.

It will be observed that "we" is emphatic in the first part of verse 3, and that the writer includes himself too in its occurrence before the close. This is one of the stock arguments against Paul's authorship of the Epistle. But it appears to be quite superficial from an oversight of its character. For, supposing Paul to be the writer, his merging himself with the Hebrews he was addressing outside his special apostolic province is precisely in keeping with the task in hand. To make this inconsistent

with Gal. 1:12 seems petty indeed; for the latter is distinctively personal, and Heb. 2:3, 4 has evidently a studious generality. He is setting forth the claim of that word which began to be spoken by the Lord Himself in contrast with the law of old, august as its introduction may have been, which he would have been the last to deny. But the Lord was here in the midst of the Jews to bring us not the law that kills the guilty, but His own great salvation for the lost. The first person does not at all mean that he had heard it, but that when it thus began to be spoken it was confirmed “unto us” by those that heard. Indeed he distinguishes himself rather from those ear-witnesses, without at all branching off to his own peculiar and long subsequent privilege outside Damascus. But he does identify himself with those whom the Lord addressed at the beginning without in the least implying that he had himself heard Him. Was he not a Hebrew of the Hebrews? To cite Eph. 3:2, 3 is therefore wholly beside the mark. Both are true, and manifestly so.

The great aim of all indeed is to put forward the Lord as the Apostle no less than High Priest of the Christian profession, as He is styled in Heb. 3:1. This accordingly leaves out not only himself born out of due time but the twelve as apostles. In presence of Him they are only “those that heard.” The Lord began the word of this salvation; they heard and confirmed it to the people responsible to receive the Christ of God; and God also bore witness with them in a way beyond all example. The object in view excluded all mention of the extraordinary Gentile apostleship, to say nothing of the grace in Paul that sought to meet the Jews as God did,

that He might disarm them of their prejudices, and give all glory to the word from His Son.

Nor can any description be conceived more exact and guarded than the language here used, while at the same time intended to impress the believing Jews with the superiority of the gospel to the law. “The which [salvation] having begun to be spoken through the Lord was confirmed unto us by those that heard, God also bearing witness with [them], both by signs and wonders and varied powers and distributions of [the] Holy Spirit according to his own will” (verses 3, 4).

Salvation took only a beginning of publication in the days of His flesh. For the work of atonement was not yet touched, as it was and could only be accomplished by His death at the close. Yet salvation assuredly began to be spoken of, when the Lord entered on His public ministry. Of this Luke 4:16 et seqq. is the beautiful witness, founded on His reading Isa. 61:1, 2, on the sabbath in the synagogue of Nazareth, and stopping with the acceptable year of Jehovah. The day of vengeance, surely to come in its season, was not to be till He comes again. It is salvation now. “Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.” Earlier still Simeon saw in the Babe the salvation of God. Now a further step was taken: the Lord had begun to speak of it. For indeed the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him, and He was anointed to preach good tidings to the poor. Jehovah had sent Him to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that were bruised, in short to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And so to weary, heavy-laden souls He gave rest in His grace from first to last, as the cross itself testifies to the utmost.

Certainly when in due season Christ died for the ungodly, when He rose with “peace be unto you,” and again “Peace” in sending by them, that salvation was confirmed by those that heard. Nor did God fail to bear His joint testimony, if those sent out were weak indeed. The Spirit given was of power and of love and of a sound mind. And His operations were such as to arrest the most careless and even hardened, while they did not, as they could not, fail to awaken unbelievers however prejudiced. Such was the effect of the Pentecostal signs and wonders and manifold powers and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. The tongues of scattered man’s speech were spoken in a moment, as the Lord had promised (Mark 16), not only a “wonder” but a “sign” to Jews gathered to the feast from all nations, as the “varied powers” were displayed in healing the sick, casting out demons, and the like. “Distributions of the Holy Spirit” find their explanation in such a scripture as 1 Cor. 12. They all were forms of divine attestation that accompanied or rather followed the great salvation confirmed by those that preached it.

The glory of Christ has, however, another side. He is Son of God before the worlds, Son of God incarnate, Son of God risen from the dead. He is God; He is Jehovah. His position suits and attests His divine dignity. But He is Son of man also; and the moral glory of His humiliation is answered by His conferred glory, as the Epistle proceeds to develop, but with marked reference to the present exaltation of our Lord since the cross on high, and not to the millennial day, though this is assured for the earth by-and-by.

“For not to angels did he subject the habitable [earth] to come whereof we speak, but one somewhere testified,

saying, What is man that thou rememberest him? Or son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than angels; with glory and honour thou crownedst him [and didst set him over the works of thy hands4]: thou didst put all things in subjection beneath his feet. For in that he subjected them all to him, he left nothing unsubjected to him. But now we see not yet them all in subjection to him. But we see him that hath been made a little lower than angels, Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that by God's grace he should taste of death for every thine," (verses 5-9).

Here the angels are not only surpassed beyond comparison, but have no place whatever. It is a question of subjection and of rule; but this is not for angels. They serve; they never reign. Man is called to rule, to have dominion. God was looking on to His Son, the Son of man. For Him the habitable earth is destined. God has not made it in vain. He knew from the first that the first man would fail. His counsels ever centre in Christ. But He must reign alone, if this were all; for all sinned and do come short of the glory of God. Yet rest for man with God in glory was ever His design. This could only be by death, the death of the Lord Jesus. His death is therefore the sole possible meeting-point, the solution of all hardest enigmas, the conciliation of perfect love with inflexible righteousness, of grace to the sinner with the untarnished glory of God, of man's weakness and of Satan's power, of judgment borne and of peace made, of the Highest taking the lowest place in obedience that He might receive the highest on a ground on which He could have the vilest now sanctified with Him, the

sharers of His joy through redemption. Such the counsels, such the ways, of God in Christ.

It will be observed that man, the Son of man, comes into the greatest and most fitting prominence. It was only the name of shame and sin, if He to whom it specially belongs were not Son of God as no one else is, as divine. But this held fast, what can be sweeter to man if he believes God? For its true force and ways we have His word, the only sure standard. Now it is never applied to Him vaguely. It is His title when He is the consciously, evidently, rejected Messiah.

In the N.T. it first occurs in Matt. 8:20. So He speaks of Himself to a scribe that proposed to follow Him "whithersoever thou goest." This might be all well for a Jew subject to the Messiah, the King, the fountain of dignity and reward. But the Lord even then realises His position. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He had come to His own things, but His own people received Him not. This was about to be fully and awfully demonstrated; but He knew it then, and speaks as already outcast and having nothing. The death of the cross would be ere long the undeniable and absolute proof; but He realises it and expresses it, not only by the title but by what accompanies it, if any were ignorant of its import. Again, "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," and proves it by enabling the paralytic at a word to arise, take up his bed, and walk (Matt. 9). He will have come before His envoys shall have gone through the cities of Israel (Matt. 10) — a mission to be resumed before that day. At the later stage of Matt. 11:19 the transition is plain; as in the solemn charge of Matt. 12:32, 40, preparatory to His bringing out the

mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, the earth and earthly people were morally judged and found good for nothing. It was now a question of “the Sower,” of a new system which He was to begin, though Satan again would ruin it as far as public result on earth appeared, yet would He secure the good and judge the evil.

Still more emphatic is the testimony of Matt. 16, where the utter unbelief of the Jews forms the background, in contrast with which shines the faith of the chief spokesman of the twelve, who receives a new name from the Lord, and learns that, on the rock of the Father’s revelation of the Son, the Son of the living God, Christ was to build His church. It was then He charged His disciples to tell no one that He was “the Christ,” not Jesus (which is absurd and not authentic, the addition of copyists ignorant of the truth). From that time forth He began to show them that He must suffer many things and be killed and raised again: His manifest chance to the full meaning of Son of man, as is pointed out expressly in Mark 8:29-31: Luke 9:20-22. The Gospel of John in his personal way sets out the same truth of transition for the Lord in John 12, where, after being presented as the Christ as is written in Zech. 9:9, in the face of the Pharisees more hostile when He raised Lazarus from the grave as the quickening Son of God, His word to Andrew and Philip speaking for the Greeks is, “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say to you, Except a corn of Wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (verses 23, 24). All judgment is committed to the Son of man, Who must be honoured thus by those who, not believing in Him as Son of God, despised Him as man: He will judge all such

(John 5). So He appears to the Jew coming in the clouds of heaven (Matt. 24); so He deals with the Gentiles in that day (Matt. 25).

Nor is it otherwise in the O.T. It is the same Spirit, as the truth is one. For it will be observed that, as Psalm 2 is a weighty testimony to His Sonship as incarnate in Heb. 1, Psalm 8 is the no less appropriate citation here in Heb. 2. Nor is this casual, but the kernel that they respectively bear. The first Psalm speaks according to the Jewish covenant and contrasts the righteous with the ungodly, as the judgment will manifest. Psalm 2 introduces the Christ, Jehovah's King on Zion. Such is the decree. For He is Son, begotten in time, as we are told here for His kingdom, before time and all things (being their Creator) as we are told elsewhere. When He asks, He will receive not Judea merely but the nations for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. But this is characterised by judgment executed publicly, in His breaking them with a rod of iron, and dashing them to pieces like a potter's vessel. Clearly this is postponed by His rejection on the part of the unbelieving Jews and lawless Gentiles; and when it is fulfilled, the church will be with Him and share His rule in a glorified state, as is explicitly declared in Rev. 2; 26, 27. Now this further stage of His rejection and its blessed consequence in a higher elevation and larger sphere, not as the Messiah only but as the humbled and glorified Son of man, is precisely the truth taught in Psalm 8 as we are instructed in our Epistle.

Thus the prefatory Psalms 1 and 2 give us the righteous man and the Messiah according to Jehovah's purpose, spite of opposing kings and peoples; the Psalms that follow, Ps. 3 - 7, point out how His Spirit works in the

circumstances and sorrows of the righteous while He does not reign; and Psalm 8 closes this series by Christ as the humbled Son of man set over all things. Though the habitable earth be not yet subjected to Him, as our scripture tells us, yet when we look at Him crowned with glory and honour on high, we behold by faith even now the divine glory set in Him above the heavens, the pledge that His name will soon be acknowledged excellent in all the earth, as it really is. Without Christ man is indeed feeble and fallen. Angels excel in might; and we naturally look up to the heavens, the moon, and the stars, though but the work of Jehovah's fingers and His ordinances. But look at man in Christ! His shame and suffering on the cross are the ground of the highest glory even God could confer on the Man that went down below all, now exalted above all far beyond the oath to David or the promise to Abram. It is the glorious dénouement of His abasement for the ' suffering of death, as it is here explained, and that God's grace might have its fullest exercise. His present place is in heaven, in no way the subjection of the habitable earth which is "to come," as the scripture itself says; still less is His seat on the Father's throne the assumption of His own throne. It is God straightway glorifying in Himself the Son of man Who glorified Him as to sin in death. For the rest we await, as He does, the times and seasons the Father has set within His own authority. He is Himself, and as man, in the highest; and we seeing it by faith bear witness to Him, to His sufferings and the glories that should follow. His immeasurable superiority to angels as man is not to be doubted, though the time is not yet for seeing all things subjected to Him. From 1 Cor. 15 we learn that it awaits the resurrection at His coming. So absolute and universal is the supremacy over

the universe He had created as God, that it seems good to the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Corinthians to except Him who subjected all to Christ; as here it is affirmed that He left nothing that is not put under Him.

How blessed and precise the appended words, “that He by God’s grace should taste death for every thing!” This last rather than “man” appears best to suit the bearing of the context. It is the sphere not merely as a universe but including “every thing” brought under the reconciling power of His death. The following verse brings in persons, and different language is used.

What gives peculiar force to “the habitable earth 5 to come” is the undeniable fact that the main object of the Epistle is to develop and maintain the present glory of Christ as He sits, on the accomplishment of redemption, at the right hand of God on High From first to last this is obvious and all-important. The Jewish Christian, disposed to abide in or glide away into earthly hopes with the Messiah or His throne for their centre, needed to be continually recalled to his actual relationship with Christ in heaven. At the same time there is no lack of testimony throughout, to the rest of God that remaineth for His people (Heb. 4), to the age to come, of which the powers vouchsafed in apostolic era were a sample and pledge (Heb. 6), to the new covenant to be made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Heb. 8), of which we have now only the principle, not the letter but spiritually, in the blood shed which is its basis, to the appearing of Christ a second time (Heb. 9), to the day approaching (Heb. 10), to the blessing concerning the things to come when the promise shall be received in fact instead of in faith (Heb. 11), to the full and ordered scene of glory in heaven and earth (Heb. 12), when the

Lord shakes not earth only but also heaven, and to the city actually come and continuing (Heb. 13).

Here we have the most distinct evidence that, whatever may be the displayed glory of the heavens in that day (and no one intelligent in Eph. 1, Col. 1, and other scriptures, would enfeeble but insist on it for Christ and the risen saints), yet it is an irreparable blank to leave out of that day's blessedness "the habitable earth." Abundant strains of the prophets anticipate it with assurance, joy, and praise, as the Law had of old, and the Psalms afterwards. Nor does the fullest light of the N.T. omit the earth in the proclamation of the coming kingdom, though the opening of heaven as the characteristic faith and hope made the higher naturally predominant. If the Lord taught His disciples to pray that the Father's kingdom should come, He did not fail to add as the next petition, "Thy will he done, as in heaven, so on earth." The revelation of new things does not blot out the old; as indeed Christ will be the centre and head of both in that day to the glory of God the Father. So is His outpouring in John 17. He asks what assuredly will be fully answered in connection with His giving to the saints the glory which the Father gave Him (not, of course, what was personally intrinsic and eternal), "that they may be one, even as we [are] one; I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them even as Thou lovedst Me." In the day of glory it will be a question of "knowing," not as now an appeal to "faith" (cf. verses 20, 21). But there is undeniably "the world" to know when they see those truly divine counsels of grace fulfilled in the manifested glory of Christ and His own. There are earthly things no

less than heavenly in the kingdom (John 3), which is as different from the present time of the gospel as from the still more remote eternity with its conditions of total and fixed change.

And how suitable is it that “the habitable earth” where the Lord was born, where He laboured, suffered, and died on the cross, should be subjected to His government, and behold His glory, and experience more blessedness under His sceptre than it groaned in misery and corruption under rebellious man misled by a mightier rebel than himself! It is His due, not only as Creator of it all but as Redeemer. There He was put to shame, there He will triumph. There man and Satan brought in death and the curse; there God and His Son will fill the earth with peace and glory. How sad the blank if this were not to be!

In vain do ancients and moderns err from the word and pervert this scripture to the state of the church under the gospel. On the face of it “to come” distinguishes the world into which God brought in the Firstborn (Heb. 1:6). Such is its state in the future; as no mystification or argument can make it legitimately mean a heavenly and spiritual system. Such as our condition of gospel and church privilege. Nor is there any difficulty in the clause that follows, “whereof we speak.” For the matter treated of is the future subjection of this habitable world to the Second man, and not to angels. Undoubtedly it is not the eternal state when He shall deliver up the kingdom to Him Who is God and Father. It is His reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet, death last of all. It is not the time when He ministers as the High Priest in heaven for those who on earth suffer and need His succour and sympathy. It is not the gospel state, but the

millennial kingdom which intervenes between the gospel as now and the eternity which closes all. It is the world or habitable earth under the manifested power and kingdom of the Lord Jesus, the rejected Messiah but Son of man exalted to reign over all peoples, nations, and languages.

Certainly the death of Christ is not here associated with God's law. What possible boon was law for the guilty? For such it can bring no blessing nor pardon, but a curse, and this righteously. Compare with Deut. 27; Rom. 4:15; 1 Cor. 15:56; Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:9. But here it is grace, God's grace; and by it Christ tasted death for everyone, if it be not rather "everything." Compare the verses before. What more, what so, expressive of outspreading mercy, with glorious consequences to the universe, from His personal glory who thus deigned to die by God's grace! God could not but have worthy purposes of goodness to accomplish rising over sin and ruin by such a death. Where sin carried the first man and his race, the Second man went by God's grace. By it He tasted death; but it was for everything.

"For it became Him for whom [are] all things, and by whom [are] all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both the sanctifier and the sanctified [are] all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name to my brethren — in [the] midst of [the] assembly will I sing thy praise. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold, I and the children which God gave me. Since then the children have a common share of blood and flesh,6 He also Himself in like manner took part in the same, that through death he might annul him that

hath the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all those that by fear of death were through the whole of their life subject to bondage" (verses 10-15).

The grand truth first before us, and justly, is that it became God — Him for whom and by whom is the universe — in bringing (not everybody but) "many sons" unto glory, to make the Leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Where sin is, in God's righteous government there must follow suffering. Undoubtedly in Christ was no sin, not only no sin done but none in Himself. But He became the responsible Man to retrieve God's honour, outraged everywhere by the creature above and below. Satan and his angels had left their first estate. Man was disobedient. All was ruin. The Son of man goes down in obedience and bears all the consequences, glorifying God infinitely even as to sin, and on the road endures sufferings in every shape and decree as none else could, according to His moral perfection and personal glory, till all was exhausted in the cross, so that it was for God's righteousness to exalt Him as now in glory. Thus was His course finished, that He in glory might bring "many sons" to glory; but the path lay through sufferings. Thus was He perfected: not that He was not ever the perfect One, but that so only could it be if God were to be vindicated and Himself the Leader of salvation for the many sons to share that heavenly glory. The work is done which gives Him a title to "everything" by redemption, as He had also the rights of Creator. He died, having made peace by the blood of His cross to reconcile all things. whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens. But He responded entirely to the gracious purpose of God which would also have "many sons" reconciled to share the

glory with Him, and therefore He accepted all the sufferings which were the necessary condition. Judgment must have closed the door irrevocably on all men as on all angels that sinned. Where would grace then have been? The sufferings of Christ made it righteous to have many sons in the same glory as Himself, not derogating from God's glory but enhancing it and giving it a new, larger, and higher form than ever. Where would judgment, have been otherwise? What did the "sons" deserve?

"For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one." No thought can be more opposed to the truth than confounding this blessed association of the saints and incarnation, so as to bring in all mankind. Beyond controversy without incarnation it could not be; but their association is founded on His death and displayed in His resurrection. Incarnation means not Christ's union with all the race, nor yet the union of the saints with Him, but (what was essential to redemption as the basis for this union) Deity united with humanity in the Word become flesh. Sinful man could not be sanctified otherwise. Incarnation was now the state of His person: henceforth God and man indissolubly joined, in order to His suffering for sins once, as He did atoningly on the tree; but it is as risen and glorified that He is said to be "made perfect," and to have become the author of everlasting salvation to all those that obey Him (Heb. 5:9).

Christ is thus effectually separating us to God. He is the Sanctifier; and both He and the sanctified are all of one. The Epistle does not rise to the unity of which we learn in Eph. and Col., or even in 1 Cor. He and they are not here said to be one, but "of one." There is efficacious

and blessed association, yet the unity of the body of Christ is not the truth which is here opened, but rather heavenly calling, as we read in Heb. 3:1. Nothing can be conceived more unwise, irreverent, and childish than therefore to slight its aim. No Epistle is more adapted than this to the Hebrews to exalt the Lord or to draw out the renewed affections of the saints. So far from being Jewish, it is the final word to deliver the too slow disciples from earthly thoughts and fleshly hopes and worldly religion to Christ in heaven.

But it is false that He and mankind are “all of one”; only He and the sanctified are.7 And sanctification is not union but separation to God. Therefore is it that in John 17 our Lord speaks of Himself, not as sanctifying others, but as sanctifying Himself. This He did not at all in the moral sense (for He was ever the Holy One of God, and even demons confessed Him so), but as setting Himself apart in heaven the model as the glorified Man to form and fashion us now by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and this expressly in absolute separation from the world of which we are not, as He is not nor was. There was grace toward the race in all perfection. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. But the world proved itself irreconcilable, though there He was rising above human sin, selfishness, and misery, “not reckoning their trespasses to them.” But they despised the reconciliation and rejected Himself. In His rejection on the cross God made Him sin — laid on Him atoningly its awful consequences — that the believer might become God’s righteousness in Him. Thus both the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one. They are one set as set apart to God.

This truth, so often gainsaid by some and undermined by others, is set forth by apt quotations from the O.T. introduced by the words, “for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” As God was not ashamed to be called the God of the fathers, so Christ is not ashamed (I say not to be called Brother but) to call us, the children, brethren. It is His relationship which He nowhere extends to man as he is, nor even to His own disciples though born of God, till He rose from the dead. Before then the utmost He uttered was altogether vague: “Behold, my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.” As risen, He sends the new message, “But go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God,” followed the same day at evening by His characteristic act of inbreathing and saying, Receive the Holy Spirit. Henceforth they had life in resurrection power, life abundantly as indeed He had promised.

But Psalm 22:22 intimates more. The time was not yet come for Messiah’s praise of God in “the great congregation” (verse 25) of Judah and Ephraim in their twelve-tribed fulness (Acts 26), when all the ends of the earth also shall remember and turn to Jehovah, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him. Verse 22 is pointedly different, and applied now by the Spirit that inspired the Epistle to the Hebrews. Indeed the truth of it was made good that evening when Jesus came (though the doors were shut for fear of the Jews), and stood in the midst of the assembled disciples, and said, “Peace be unto you,” showing them withal His hands and His side, the marks of that death in which He

was made a sacrifice for sin. The Psalm impresses on the scene, not the mission of peace as in the gospel, but the united praise of the assembly which Jesus Himself leads as “in the midst.” And how deep and high and truly of divine savour is that praise which Jesus hymns! How unbelieving to doubt that, as He is in the midst where two or three are gathered to His name, we may count on His leadership of praise! May we be not faithless but believing!

Is this to lower the Lord? It ought to strengthen us in the grace that is in Him, drawing out the proof how truly the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one. Hear further, “And again, I will put my trust in Him; and again Behold, I and the children which God gave me.” The first of these truths occurs repeatedly in the O.T., but it would seem that it is cited with a suitable modification from the same prophecy which furnishes the second, Isa. 8:14, 18. The original passage is full of interest, and affords a strikingly pertinent application to the Christian Hebrews. For the Son of David had been just before predicted as to be born of the virgin, yet called Immanuel (Isa. 7), and owned (Isa. 8) as a child born to the Jews, yet Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, unquestionably the Messiah. Before the day when He increases the nation and breaks the rod of the oppressor, He shall be for a sanctuary, but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon and fall and be broken and be snared and be taken. Still more remarkable language follows. “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for Jehovah that hideth his face from the house of Jacob,

and I will look for him. Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts who dwelleth in Mount Zion."

This has been accomplished to the letter. The day is at hand for the display of His power and glory in the deliverance of Israel. Meanwhile it is only a remnant of them that is in relationship with Him; and they are more than ever favoured spiritually. The testimony is bound up, the law or teaching sealed, among His disciples to whom He is a sanctuary, while His face is hid from the house of Jacob generally. So that He and the children given Him of Jehovah, the Sanctifier and the sanctified, are for signs and for wonders while He is a rock of offence to both houses of Israel. It is just the place of Him who became man to trust in Jehovah, and of those given Him by Jehovah from the Jews (as in principle true of all Christians) meanwhile. He was as truly man as Jehovah; and we who are given Him reap the blessing of both facts united in His person. The dependent man was the Lord God of Israel, the sanctuary of the remnant when the nation stumbled at the Stumbling-stone.

Here is the deduction. "Since then the children have a common share (κεκοινώνηκεν) of blood and flesh, he also himself in like manner took part in the same, that through death he might annul him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all those that by fear of death were through the whole of their life subject to bondage" (verses 14, 15). The Son of God became man, as the children were men, in order to meet Satan in his last stronghold of death, and thus by dying exhaust his power for those who being under law were harassed all their life long by fear in their conscience. It

is plain that the enemy is here in view, as God was in verse 10, and as the sufferings of Christ vindicated God's holy nature and character, leaving His love free to act in saving us and bringing us to glory, so did His death break Satan's power to nought and deliver from fear the troubled saints, henceforth in peace, for He was raised for their justification. Satan is no longer to the believer the King of terrors. Christ has disarmed the enemy by submitting to death, and his power is gone for ever for His own. His resurrection proved the seal of death broken for us, as for us He died; and our resurrection will be the demonstration of its truth, not to us that believe who have in ourselves the witness of His grace and glory, but to all who disbelieve, rejecting Christ and the gospel.

"Since then the children have a common share of blood and flesh, he also himself in like manner took part in the same, that through death he might annul him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those that by fear of death were through the whole of their life subject to bondage" (verses 14, 15).

Here we have indeed the Incarnation set out more definitely than anywhere else in this Epistle or perhaps in any other. Here then those who base their theology on that immense and to us most affecting truth, considering Who He was that was thus made flesh, should compare their deductions with the revealed mind of God. The Holy Spirit brings before us its true objects and design. Far be it from the heart to seek to limit its scope. Let other scriptures be taken into account, and no ray of heavenly light from any be shut out. Only let it be the divine truth, and not human speculation; for no one fully

knows (ἐπιγινώσκει) the Son but the Father. Be it ours therefore to hear, and to adore.

Clearly then “the children” are in immediate view, and not a vague and vain thought of all mankind. As they had blood and flesh as their common portion, He also in like manner took part in the same. Blessed a proof as it may be that God’s good pleasure is not in angels, however near Him and in themselves glorious, but in men, weak though they are, yea, worthless and wretched through sin, His eye is on them for good, His heart toward them in mercy, and so much the more because misled and oppressed by a powerful and relentless foe. But it is no ineffectual testimony that we hear. Jesus had come in grace, or, as we are told elsewhere, “anointed of God with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” But man would none of Him, however welcome at first; least of all His own people. Jew and Gentile conspired to reject Him even to the death of the cross. In that death God broke the power of the devil, wrought deliverance for His own, and laid an atoning and eternal basis, not only to meet but through faith to save the foulest sinners on earth. Nothing but the death of Christ could bring to nought him that had the power of death; nothing else deliver all those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Incarnation is a blessed truth, but it is only the means to the end here specified — and where misused as it often is, it clouds and shuts out that death which defeats the enemy and delivers the captives, as being the true ground of God’s righteousness, because there only was sin judged definitely and in grace toward the guilty.

Infidelity denies God and His Christ altogether: His deity and His incarnation are to it nothing, as God is in none of its thoughts. But with fallen Christendom the controversy habitually is, whether deliverance turns on a living Christ on earth? or on a dead and risen Christ exalted to heaven? Tradition and humanitarianism affirm the former. Scripture alone asserts the truth, because it alone, while declaring incarnation fully, leaves room for the vindication of God and the annulling of Satan, the judgment of sin and the deliverance of the believer, as well as the glorifying of Christ.

The same death of Christ lays doubtless a ground for all men, as we see in Rom. 3 and elsewhere. In virtue of the blood on the mercy-seat God's righteousness is "unto all," and "upon all that believe." Here it is the last only. It is "the children" who are in question, whom Christ is not ashamed to call "brethren." The world at large does not therefore come into this account. We must be subject to the word of God, and receive truth as God reveals it: else we fall into confusion.

Now we come to those in whom the Saviour is directly and blessedly interested. Here again is nothing vague, but all is made carefully precise.

"For doubtless not of angels doth he lay hold,8 but of Abraham's seed he layeth hold. Whence it behoved him in all things. to be made like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to help those that are tempted" (verses 16-18).

The rendering of verse 16 is faultily given in many versions, in none perhaps worse than our own A.V. The sense is totally changed, and a preterite form assigned to the verb, instead of the present tense, the natural consequence of such a change of sense. “He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took,” etc. This, it is evident, ἐπιλαμβάνεται cannot bear. It is expressly a present. Again the word means to lay hold of, especially when with a genitive as here in the middle voice. Such is its force, even when uncompounded; and the preposition defines or emphasises. Never does it mean to take a nature, though the A.V. seems to have been led into this, partly by Beza,9 chiefly by certain Greek commentators, 10 for whose mistake no excuse can be made. They were occupied with controversies which misled them to catch at straws. The incarnation was the chief one in this case. But this had been fully treated and just closed. The Holy Spirit here goes on to Christ’s making a special object, not of angels but of Abraham’s seed, which of itself ought to have guarded reflecting minds from the error. Why Abraham rather than Adam? It is evidently owing to another truth, no longer the assumption of human nature, but their cause he undertakes. Incarnation was the necessary means, in order to accomplish this and other ends according to God. Here the seed of promise comes into view, a truth palatable to those who valued their descent from Abraham; but, as our Lord showed (John 8), they only are Abraham’s children who do the works of Abraham; and none do his works who share not his faith; which, as it did not go with mere fleshly descent, so it was open to those who had like precious faith. For they that be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:9).

The uncertainty that has prevailed is extraordinary as to almost every word. “For” is the only right sense, not “moreover” as Macknight says, nor “besides” with M. Stuart. The word δήπου was quite mistaken by those that followed the laxity of the Vulgate. The Syriac Versions early and late pass it by altogether. It occurs nowhere else in the Greek Testament nor yet in the Septuagint, but its force is unequivocally in the ordinary usage of the language, as “doubtless,” “I presume,” “forsooth.” We have already seen that “to take up” or “undertake the cause” is the meaning of the verb so emphatically repeated, negatively and positively. Angels He has not as the object of His care, but Abraham’s seed He has. It may be applied to laying hold or arresting with hostile intent: where a gracious aim is plain as here, the sense is no less certain. Assuming a nature is without example and in no way involved in the word itself. Nor does it suit the verse either; because for our Lord to assume Abraham’s seed had no nature distinctively. Of blood and flesh it had been already declared He partook, but this is humanity; and the reason assigned is that, as the children, or Abraham’s seed, had a common share of the same, He is no doubt undertaking their cause, not that of angels. When it comes to the question of espousing a cause, not of incarnation, we hear not of human nature, but expressly of those separated on the ground of divine promise, the objects of grace.

Hence the moral necessity that He should be “in all things made like to his brethren.” Even though deigning to become man, He might have been in wholly different circumstances from most or all. Yet Adam never knew what it was to be a man, as the Lord of glory did from

birth onward. From what trial or suffering was He exempted, sin only excepted? and this that He might in due time be of God made sin on the cross, bearing its bitterest consequences? And this we see as the end in view in 18, “That He might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

The allusion is plain to the exceptional position of the high-priest on the day of atonement. He and he alone was the actor on that day, and this typically. Christ and Christ alone was the one sufferer also in the antitype. What was wrought on the cross goes far beyond the “shadow,” though the shadow was constructed to indicate a great deal. But Christ alone gives us the full truth of atonement or of anything else, because He is the truth. His person, unique and divine, made the superiority in every respect.

It was not at all the normal action of priesthood in the holy place. The high priesthood on that day was representative of the people before God in their sins. This was quite extraordinary. A far deeper need was in question than intercession that followed, or representing them within in their acceptance. If sin was to be adequately dealt with even in type, and only for the purifying of the flesh, and but for a year, no other way lay open. It is not application, but God met according to His nature: even the people’s lot was putting the confessed sins away out of His sight in the form. The momentous reality appears in all its moral glory and efficacy in that work of Christ’s death for sin and our sins, which has perfected and glorified God, and brought in eternal redemption.

The English versions are various, and none of them exact, yet there is no uncertainty as to the sense. Wiclif is the most paraphrastic — “that He schulde be made merciful and a feithful bischop to God, that He schulde be merciful to the trespassis of the puple.” Tyndale is closer, “that He myght be mercifull, and a faythfull hye preste in thynges concernynge God, for to pourge the peoples synnes.” And so Cranmer and the Geneva Bible. The Rhemish has the barbarous Latin servilely reproduced, “that He might repropitiate,” etc. The A.V. gives “to make reconciliation for the sinnes of the people”: an awkward misrendering. Reconciliation is of persons, as well as of creation; but for sins is not justifiable. Propitiation or atonement for them is correct.

Here too it will be noticed that the Spirit of God does not warrant that unlimited extension for which so many contend. And such is the frailty and caprice of man’s mind that those who without and contrary to the text would widen the sphere of “the people,” and “the children of Abraham,” and “His brethren” to all mankind are often the same who on shallow grounds would expunge the universality of the outlook of divine righteousness in Rom. 3:22, and chance the beautiful distinction of “unto all, and upon all those that believe,” into the indiscriminate and feeble generality of “unto all them that believe.”

The propitiation of Christ is the basis of His priestly action on high. Save the exceptional work of atonement, there was and could be nothing of the kind. For heaven alone is its regular sphere; and this runs through our Epistle from first to last. It was when made perfect (and this was clearly after His sufferings were complete), that He became the cause of everlasting salvation to all that

obey Him, being addressed or saluted of God as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5). But the basis of an all-sufficing, God-glorifying propitiation must first be laid and accepted; and then He takes His place in heaven to intercede for those whose sins He bore.

But there was another necessity fully met. He must know not sin but suffering. He must be tempted to the uttermost, sin excepted (Heb. 4), in order to succour the tempted. “For in that he hath suffered when tempted, he is able to help those that are tempted,” (verse 18).

Temptation means trial; never in Christ’s case, what is in fallen man’s inward solicitation to evil. This is what the Holy Spirit expressly denies of Him, and what no one who believed in His person ought to have allowed for a moment. Lustful experience or sin is incompatible with the Holy One of God; and, so far from being in a single instance predicated of Him, it is wholly excluded: χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας could be said of neither Enoch nor Elijah, nor of John and Paul, but of Him only. The blessed endurance of temptation (James 1:2, 12) He knew beyond any; but what James describes in verses 13-15 of his first chapter was foreign to Him, and a blasphemous imputation, as it proves fundamental unbelief of Who and what He is. We are too familiar with the human and selfish argument that He could not sympathise with us adequately if exempt from those internal and evil workings, bemoaned in Rom. 7 and bitterly known by every soul born of God, at least in the early days of his awakening. But if we needed the Lord to be similarly harassed in order to feel fully with us, we should on that ground want Him to have yielded, as we alas! have often done, in order to sympathise with us in our sad failures. No! that ground is wretchedly and absolutely opposed to

Christ; and what the word reveals as the remedy for evil within and without in every form and degree is not Christ's sympathy, but His propitiatory suffering for us. He sympathises with us in our holy, not in our unholy, temptations. For our unholiness He died; the cross alone has met it fully in God's sight. Had there been in fact the least inward taint of sin, His sensibility of evil had been impaired, His sufferings diminished, and His sympathy hindered, to say nothing of the deadly wound to His person, unfitted by such an evil nature to be a sacrifice for sin.

3 The real force of the verb is intransitive, not transitive as in the A.V. Prov. 3:21 (LXX.) means, "Do not slip away," not "Let them not pass from thee." Though the context modifies that rendering a little, the usage is uniform. Wiclif seems nearest ("fleten meie"), Tyndale and Cranmer "peryshe," Geneva the worst of all. The margin is far from satisfactory.

4 B, etc., omit this clause, for which A D P. etc. vouch.

5 That

ἡ οἰκουμένη means "the habitable earth," or the world, whether as it is or as it will be in the age to come, and neither heaven nor eternity, nor a gospel or church state, will be plain from an examination of its occurrences: Matt. 24:14; Luke 2:1, Luke 4:5, Luke 21:26; Acts 11:28, Acts 17:6, 31, Acts 19:27, Acts 24:5; Rom. 10:18; Heb. 1:6, Heb. 2:5; Rev. 3:10, Rev. 12:9, Rev. 16:14.

6 The great weight of the best MSS. supports the less usual order (A B C D E M P, some cursives, and many ancient versions and fathers). The same order occurs in Eph. 6:12, and even in Polyaen. Strag. iii. 11.

7 It may be well to observe how that

οἱ ἁγιαζόμενοι here does not mean the process going on, although the phrase in itself is quite capable of such a force. The present in Greek, as in other tongues also, can express character apart from time, as every scholar knows and every person of intelligence must own on reflection. This is rendered certain of “the sanctified” here by comparing Heb. 10:10, 14, which could not be said at the same time if sanctification were here viewed as only in progress. In other words, if we were only being sanctified, we could not also be said, as we are, to have been now sanctified (ἡγιασμένοι) as a distinct and enduring fact, and further that He has perfected without a break (τετελείωκεν εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς) τοὺς ἁγαζομὲνους. It is not true, as Dean Alford said, that the perfect expresses God’s purpose respecting these objects. It is on the contrary present standing, the actual result of a past action.

8 Wiclif, following the Latin, says simply “He took “; Tyndale, better still, “He taketh on Him,” though wrongly giving “in no place”: so Cranmer. The Geneva V. gave the past tense and “in no sort” wrongly. The A.V., though right as to “verily,” went farther astray by inserting “the nature of.”

9 The substance of his annotation I transcribe from the fifth and last edition of his N.T., dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, 1598. “Angels, that is, angelic nature.... He a little before said κεκοινώνηκε instead of κοινωνεῖ!, so now on the other hand he employs the present for the past!! which exchanges of tenses everywhere occur with Hebrews. Vulg. apprehendit not badly, but a word unusual in setting out the hypostatic union of the two

natures. Abraham's seed that is, the real nature of man, especially of Abraham's family.... Wherefore the more to be execrated is the audacity of Castalio, who renders ἐπιλαμβάνεται by opitulatur [helpeth], an interpretation not only false but irreverent, since ἐπ. never expresses this among the Greeks," etc., etc. Now it is true that Dean Alford, etc., who agree with C., go too far. With the dative the verb does mean to help. But the fact is that the French divine was blinded by theological prejudice, to say nothing of feeling against a rival translator, who here, if not quite accurate, was nearer the truth, would not swerve from grammatical requirement, and gave the sense substantially. There is on the one hand no enallage, as Beza says, but a clear and correct statement of a manifest and indisputable truth; on the other, it is untrue that Castalio invented a meaning new and unheard of, but pertinent to the unfolding argument of the chapter, whereas Beza offends against correct language, and destroys the truth here intended, confounding it with what was already laid down.

10 Take the best of them, J. Chrysostom, who comments as follows on the passage: "What is this he says? He took up an angel's nature, not a man's. But what is, He layeth hold? Not that nature of the angels, says he, did He seize, but ours. And wherefore did he not say, He took up, but employ this expression, He layeth hold? From the metaphor of those that pursue persons that turn away and do everything so as to catch them though they flee, and lay hold of them though bounding off. For He pursued closely and caught human nature in its flight from Him and flying far, for we were far off. He showed that this He has done by kindness to man alone, and love and guardian care" (In Epp. Paul. vii. 63, ed. Field,

Oxen., 1862). Theodoret adds nothing of real value, as he repeats the same exegetical mistake. He notices the peculiarity of Abraham's seed in such a connection, and tries to explain it as a reminder of the promise. Quite true; but incarnation and promise are wholly distinct, though this could not have been without that.

Hebrews 3

Hebrews 3 follows 1 and 2 in beautiful order. For “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” answers to the chapters before: the first of these titles of Christ being specially connected with His being Son of God, as the second is with that of Son of man. He comes from God to man on earth; He goes from man to God in heaven. And this is largely, though not entirely, the reason why the writer was led not to speak of himself as an apostle. He had it as his task to present Christ as the Apostle. This might have been enough for one whose reverence was guided unerringly by the Holy Spirit. We can understand why he forebore to speak of himself or any other when so speaking of Him; even if there had not been the gracious reason of not so introducing himself beyond his allotted sphere of the uncircumcision. And we may notice the further and not unimportant or uninteresting fact that, in writing to the Hebrew believers, he is exercising the function of a teacher rather than of an apostle, however truly he was this. He is unfolding the treasures of the O.T. in the light of Christ, of His blood, and His presence in heaven most particularly. And thus we are indebted to the exceptional circumstances in which the Epistle was written that it is the richest specimen of inspired teaching in the Bible, more than any other affording and applying the key of Christ’s work and position and offices, and grace and glory in all; to unlock what had otherwise been to us hard and obscure. What an incentive and aid to encourage us to follow in the same path in our poor measure, by His grace who so enabled him! Were all the commentaries that are extant on the O.T. to be effaced,

is it too much to say that it would be a real gain if the Lord's servants betook themselves afresh to its study with a believing use of this single Epistle to the Hebrews? Certain it is that few have adequately profited by it, because they have so much tradition to unlearn; and that the mass even of saints are so steeped in preconceived ideas that the simple yet profound truth it presents is foreclosed and escapes them.

Christ's apostleship leads to the comparison with Moses, as His high priesthood with that of Aaron, the main topic in a large part of the treatise.

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus; faithful as he is to him that appointed him, as also [was] Moses, in all his house. For he hath been accounted worthy of more glory than Moses, by so much as he that built the house hath more honour than it. For every house is builded by some one; but he that built all things [is] God. And Moses indeed [was] faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things afterward to be spoken; but Christ as Son over his house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the boldness and the glorying of the hope firm to the end" (verses 1-6).

There is emphasis, of course, in the unusual combination, "holy brethren." Since the Jews as such were accustomed to be called "brethren" after the flesh, there was the more propriety in designating Christian Jews "holy brethren," however truly it applies to any Christian.

Again, as the chosen nation was partaker of an earthly position and hope, we can understand well the force of

describing the believers in Christ from its midst as “partakers of a heavenly calling.” Such indeed they were. They entered the new privilege not by a tie of birth but by call of God; and this, as it was from Christ in heaven, so it was to heavenly glory, bearing earthly rejection, suffering and shame, as the Epistle shows from first to last. The calling upward or high calling of Phil. 3:14 answers to it.

Truly we must distinguish the heavenly calling from the calling in Eph. 4:1, developed in that Epistle which is still more intimate and precious. For it is bound up with the mystery concerning Christ and concerning the church. Accordingly we do not hear of the oneness of the body with its Head in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as we do not hear of Christ the High Priest in that to the Ephesians. Even when church is spoken of in our Epistle (Heb. 12:23), it is regarded in its individual components, not in its unity: so distinct is the design of each. Hence we are not viewed here as quickened with Christ, raised up together with Him and seated together in Him in heavenly places, but as represented by Him in heaven, where He appears for us and gives us while here below access into the holies.

Christ is shown to surpass Moses and Aaron next, as we have already seen the angels left behind in Heb. 1, 2. The contrast with Moses is traced in Heb. 3. That with Aaron begins in the latter part of Heb. 4. But it is well also to notice “our confession.” It leaves room for such as turn out mere professors; for it is not even said “our faith,” though this might soon become a lifeless creed. And this is borne out by the solemn warnings not to neglect, to hold fast, and the like, which abound

throughout our Epistle, as we find similarly in the First Epistle to the Corinthians and in that to the Colossians.

It will be noticed that the name of “Jesus” stands here in its simple majesty. For a Jewish Christian it was all-important. Every Jew owned the Messiah or Christ. The Christian Jews confessed Him already come in Jesus. And the aim of this Epistle is to open even from the ancient oracles the varied glories that centre in Him with all the store of blessing for those that are His.

Nor is it only that Jesus “was” faithful, though this is true. But “is” goes farther as the more general and absolute term. Only it seems strange that reverent minds should venture to apply to Him ποιή, in the sense, so liable to misconstruction and error, of making or creating Him, when the context clearly points to constituting Him officially.

If Moses was a messenger of God singularly honoured as all confess, he was after all in an inferior position, however faithful in all the house of God. But Jesus was not only a Man approved of God among the Jews beyond all by miracles and wonders and signs in their midst, not only anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, going about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, unequalled in word and deed yet withal the lowliest in obedience and love and holiness; but “He hath been accounted worthy of more glory than Moses, by so much as He that built the house hath more honour than it” i.e. the house. And in this case the reason has no limit. “For every house is builded by some one; but he that built all things [is] God.” The allusion is evident to the argument and the proofs of Heb. 1. Jesus, whatever office He may fill, is God. He sheds glory on the position

He takes, though assuredly the way in which He administers each office redounds to the glory of Him that appointed Him.

It is interesting to see that the axiom of the fourth verse is the morally irresistible argument from design, which has been more or less ably applied by those who have written on the evidence of creation to its Creator. Prof. M. Stuart labours in vain over this verse, and gives up its relevance in the context as hopelessly obscure. But as in Heb. 1 and 2 we have seen the universe in relation to Christ, so it is here. God formed it all, but Christ created it as the divine person active in the work, for He is God no less than the Father, and set over the house not as servant like Moses but as Son, and this in the closer sense of the house wherein He dwells, besides the broader one of the universe which He established. The Jews were apt to confine their regards to His choice of themselves. God does not forget, nor would He have us to forget, Christ's supremacy as Heir of all things.

But there is a truth also of the deepest interest to believers. The house or dwelling-place depends on redemption. Whatever might be the ultimate end of God in what He made, sin came in at once through the creature's lack of dependence. God could only dwell on the ground of redemption. Hence it is that in Genesis we have no dwelling of God here below. He might visit Adam, or yet more and more touchingly Abraham; but even with Abraham He does not dwell. In Exodus God has His dwelling in the midst of a poor unworthy and failing people; but it is solely in virtue of redemption. No doubt it was only partial and provisional, alike the redemption and the dwelling of God, each the type of that which is perfect and everlasting. And the wonderful

fact in Christianity is that both are now verified by the coming and work of our Lord Jesus. No redemption will ever surpass or even equal what is already. With (or by) His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained everlasting redemption. Hence, as Ephesians teaches, we are builded together for God's habitation in Spirit. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven makes it good. What an incomparable privilege is God's dwelling, and Christ's body, as the same chapter had shown, to say nothing now of the many and yet fuller testimonies! Redemption of the body and of the inheritance will be more evident., but the redemption of our souls now, while only in Christ before God, which is attested and enjoyed in the Holy Spirit's power, bringing the deepest knowledge of and communion with God for heaven.

Here, however, it is first the general truth of the universe as God's house, with which we do well to compare Rev. 21:3. It is in the eternal scene fully that this will be vindicated and manifested. Our Epistle does not here develop that perfect rest of God, but pursues its present aim of comparing the great chief of the legal economy with the still greater One Whom the Jews had crucified by the hands of lawless Gentiles. "And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as an attendant for a testimony of thinks afterward to be spoken; but Christ as Son over His house, whose house are we" — we emphatically, as the Epistle never confounds the "sanctified" with mere Jews or all mankind. It states carefully those that are set apart by the Sanctifier, even Jesus, the test of God for man. Moses never rose above a servant, nor is the creature in any case, were he Gabriel in heaven or yet Michael the archangel. Jesus is the Son,

the eternal Word, the Only-Begotten who is (not was merely, but is) in the bosom of the Father from everlasting to everlasting. In His case therefore it was not merely for a testimony of what should be spoken. His was and is glory intrinsic and personal. He was the Faithful Witness, as in all things He has the pre-eminence; and so He is here and now spoken of as Son over His house, the house of God, as it ought not to be doubted. There is no sufficient ground for “His own” house as in the A.V. It is the house of God throughout, even though its present application is immensely and necessarily modified by redemption in Christ. Hence His confessors really constitute this house, with the implication in the serious words that follow, “if we hold fast the boldness and the boast of the hope firm to the end.”

The Spirit of God foresaw the danger of those addressed. Freshness of enjoyment is apt to pass, and souls are thereby exposed, under trying circumstances, to turn toward what was left behind when grace and truth wrought in power. The course of time, with distractions within (for so it will be till Christ come, in presence of an enemy who hates all that is of Him) and with attractions for the flesh without, tests souls. It is well when we hold fast firm to the end the boldness and the glorying which the hope forms and entitles us to. But it may be very different even with real children of God; and it will assuredly prove those that are unreal. For the same things which injure those born of God are the ruin of those who have not life in Christ. Hence the grave caution here enjoined, peculiarly needed by those addressed, and in no small measure by those drawn to

the Lord's name out of a professing mass, when clouds gather, difficulties increase, and desertions are frequent.

Is it not an extraordinary deduction from verse 6, that the Christian is in danger from confidence in his soul, and from the boast which glory before us inspires? Yet such is the perversion that prevails among those who shrink from enjoying the revealed riches of God's grace in Christ. It is plain and sure that the Holy Spirit here takes for granted that the Christian has the confidence to which Christ and His redemption entitle every simple-hearted believer, and that the glory of God we hope for is a happy and settled boast. Those who think otherwise have been defrauded of their proper portion by ignorant, perhaps false, guides. The real danger against which the Hebrew confessors are warned is giving up that confidence and boast. They are urged to hold it fast. This is the reverse of cautioning them against such confidence. The Christian dishonours the Lord by not cherishing true confidence and abounding hope; and yet more by giving them up, through difficulties or trials, when once possessed. This is the dangerous unbelief against which they are admonished.

It is clearly not our standing which is in question; for this being wholly of God and in Christ is settled and sure and unchanging. There is no "if" either as to Christ's work or as to glad tidings of God's grace. All there is unconditional grace to faith. The wilderness journey is before us, flowing very simply from the allusion to Moses. And this is followed up with evident suitability in the quotation from Psalm 95. Here it is that "if" has its necessary place, because it is our walk through the desert, where there are so many occasions of failure, and we need constant dependence on God.

“Wherefore even as the Holy Spirit saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tempted [me] 11by proof and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was displeased with this 12 generation, and said, They always err in their heart, and they ignored my ways: as I swore in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest. See, brethren, lest there be in any one of you a wicked heart of unbelief in falling away from a living God; but exhort yourselves each day while it is called today lest any of you be hardened by deceitfulness of sin” (verses 7-13).

Now Psalm 95 is in its open force a final call from the Spirit of Christ to Israel in view of the great morrow when the kingdom is introduced for the earth in the power and glory of Messiah’s presence. They are therefore to hear His voice “today” (verse 7). Hence it is truly applicable since the apostles called souls to believe the gospel in view of Christ’s appearing. But nowhere is it more apt than as here urged on the Hebrews.

To hear His voice is the characteristic of Christ’s sheep. So the rejected Son of God puts it Himself in John 10:3, 4, 16, 27: compare John 5:24. On this depend the most blessed issues; as the rejection of His voice is to lie down in sorrow, the prey of a mightier rebel than man. It is the work of the Spirit to give one hitherto deaf to hear Him, according to His will who spoke on “the holy mount” (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). It is life, eternal life.

Alas! it was easy to hear with the outward ear only, and to harden the heart, even as Stephen warned. “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do

always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:5 1). Sin is in the measure of truth heard and despised; and what testimony can God present to those who refused the voice of Christ not only humbled but glorified, who died for sinners? The very blessedness of the gospel, "so great salvation," marks the desperateness of the need, and the imminence of the danger.

So, but not at all to the same degree, it was with Israel of old "in the provocation, in the day of the temptation in the wilderness" (verse 8). The allusion is to Meribah and Massah which the Septuagint thus translates. Compare Psalm 95:8: The Septuagint, however, in Ex. 17:7, gives not "provocation" as in the Psalms, but "reviling" as in verse 2 also. Elsewhere Meribah is rendered ἀντιλογία, contradiction. Massah is uniformly translated πειρασμός, temptation, and this against God as the strife or reviling was against Moses more immediately. Tempting Jehovah in the desert was saying, Is Jehovah among us or not? This may seem to unbelievers a small offence; in the eyes of God and of faith it is heinous. Had He not broken the pride and power of Egypt on behalf of His poor unworthy people? Had He not brought them out of the house of bondage. triumphantly, their Guide and their Rearguard, to dwell among them and be their God?

"For ask now of the days that are past which were before thee" (says Moses to Israel, Deut. 4), "since the day that God created man upon the earth and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard,

and live? Or hath God essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation by temptation, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors according to all Jehovah your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" And was He less toward them all the wilderness journey in daily manna and rock-flowing water, in sheltering care and guiding mercy, notwithstanding their too constant murmuring and waywardness, their disobedience and stubborn rebellion every now and then? Righteousness indeed there was in Him, and holy abhorrence of evil; but O what unwearied compassion and unfailing goodness! Truly they tempted by putting Him to the proof in the midst of unceasing tokens of His faithful presence. It was bad for heathen blinded by lusts and Satan's power to say, because of the chastisements of Israel's sins, Where is their God? How much worse for themselves to ask, Is Jehovah among us or not? And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.... How often did they rebel against Him in the wilderness and grieve Him in the desert! And they turned again, and tempted God and provoked (or limited) the Holy One of Israel (Psalm 78:18, 41, 42). The least that became such a people before such a God was to judge self and go forward in the assurance of His gracious power. But not so did Israel, though they "saw His works forty years" (verse 9).

"Wherefore I was displeased with this generation, and said, They always err in their hearts, and they ignored my ways" (verse 10). It was just because He is just and true that God felt so deeply the refractory and deceitful rising up of Israel against His will. Their error lay not in their understanding but in their heart: hence they never

got to learn God's ways but ignored them. Moses truly feared and loved Him: thus only are His ways discovered and delighted in. as it is written in another psalm (103), "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel." Above His palpable doings they did not discern. "As I sware in my wrath if they shall enter into my rest" (i.e. they shall not). A solemn sentence of exclusion. In man's mouth it is elliptical, God do so to me and more, if — ! In God's lips the condition of man's entering is the moral certainty that it is all over with him. Good is only and wholly of grace. There is no entrance into the rest of God, if it depend on man's deserts. If they shall enter means for unbelievers, that they shall not enter.

It may be well here to say that God's rest is for us future and in glory. We lose the force of the teaching in these two chapters, especially Heb. 4 in which it is so conspicuous, if we conceive it to be anything given to us on our first believing in Jesus, or found experimentally in submitting to His easy yoke and light burden. Both of these are real and important now, as we know from Matt. 11:28-30. But the rest of God is when work is over and burden is no more; when the enemy deceives not and creation no longer groans, when judgment is executed on earth and righteousness reigns, and Jehovah alone is exalted in that day, Heaven and earth shall be united in a chain of descending goodness and universal blessing, when Christ is no longer hid in God, and His sons are revealed for the deliverance which the long enthralled creation awaits. Till that day God works, because there is still unremoved sin and misery; and we work in the communion of His love. When it comes, we shall be in the rest of God.

“See, brethren, lest there be in any one of you a wicked heart of unbelief in falling away from a living God; but exhort yourselves each day while it is called today, lest any one of you be hardened by deceitfulness of sin” (verses 12, 13).

Here the root of the mischief is touched. It is “unbelief.” This hindered Israel of old from setting their hope in God (Psalm 78:7). This exposed them to forget His works and to break His commandments, neither the heart prepared aright nor the spirit stedfast with God. It is impossible that He should lie or be not faithful, yea gracious. Faith is invited and may be bold to rest on Him confidently, now especially that He has raised Christ from the dead and given Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God. None, however, were so liable to stop short and ask for signs as the Jews, accustomed as they were to a religious system of rite, ceremony, and symbolism. As Christendom has largely fallen back from faith into a resumption of these rudiments of the world, which the work and glory of Christ now condemn as weak and “beggarly elements” (Gal. 4). there is like danger of unbelief. It is in truth departure from a living God for forms which He used to do service before Christ came and died atoningly, when redemption from under the law was effected, and the believer passed from bond-service into the status of a son and heir of God, receiving the Spirit of adoption so as to cry Abba, Father. Anything short of this is not Christian relationship; and it is in evident contrast with Jewish subjection to ordinances, to which the Catholic bodies (not Romanist only) have turned back again. It is a deceptive form of unbelief, a going away from the living

God to dead forms, because the heart lacks confidence in His grace in Christ.

So it was with Israel; so it is with Christendom. No wonder that it is denounced as “a wicked heart” of unbelief. For what else is or can be distrust of such a God? The more His love is revealed, the more is the heart convicted of wickedness that refuses to receive His grace, or (worse still) gives it up. Nothing more false than to regard faith as a mere process of the mind, involving nothing moral, but on the deep principle of subjection to God’s word. To believe, to bow to Christ Whom God has sent, is the first and most imperative of calls. What obligation to compare with being at the feet of the Son of God, Who became incarnate to suffer for my sins? God too was glorified in Him and His cross, as in nought else. Hence the Father’s glory raised Him from the dead, that believing in Him I should know myself and all who have been brought nigh to God. Is it not a wicked heart of unbelief that neglects so great salvation? It is this even in a worse degree, after confessing Him, to depart from a living God thus proved for any other object: for here only is He known truly by a sinner and best honoured. For us love, service, worship, and all that is good follow faith and cannot exist without it.

Hence the call to encourage, not exactly one another, though this is included, but “yourselves,” which seems rather more pointed than the former phrase. They were to encourage each other day by day as long as it is called today (the day of grace), that none should be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. For which of us knows not by humbling and bitter experience its luring character and slippery paths? A little evil allowed is the

beginning of very great evil. The heart is hardened as we look off from Jesus, and self-pleasing takes the place of doing God's will; and only mercy's intervention hinders the end from being, according to the way. Truly sin is deceitful.

It is the wilderness which is ever before us in this Epistle; not Canaan, the type of the heavenly places, which is the ground of the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is here therefore the scene of trial and danger through unbelief, with the fleshly and worldly lusts to which it exposes. Hence here too the early exhortations are interspersed with doctrine. Further, as in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, profession has prominence. For though reality is assumed, room is left for those whose minds only accepted the truth which their lips confessed, but they were not born of God, and hence fell away through fear, external attractions, revival of their religious habits, or other causes of a natural kind. For this reason we have responsibility urged with grave warnings, and as the Gentile saints are so dealt with in Corinth, so here are the Hebrews that bore the name of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, as has been often remarked, the "ifs" which so abound in this context as elsewhere. Faith profits by the admonitions which flesh takes lightly to its fall in the desert. Where the tie of life and love was never formed between Christ and the soul, the need of grace and mercy is not felt; glory on high, fades into nothingness, as the earth rises before the heart as a place of present enjoyment in desire, if not effectively.

"For we have become companions of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of the assurance until the end while it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For who on

hearing did provoke? Nay, did not all that came out of Egypt through Moses? And with whom was he displeased forty years? And to whom swore He that they should not enter into His rest but to the disobedient? And we see that they could not enter in on account of unbelief" (verses 14-19).

The word often translated is the same as is quoted from the Greek version of Psalm 45 in Heb. 1:9. "Companion" would be more modern English, but the same rendering is kept up here as in the Psalm to which the allusion is made. "Partakers" not only breaks the thread of connection, but suggests what might easily mislead. There is no lowering of Christ's glory in applying the word to those who confess Him. For when first used, the Holy Spirit carefully recalls how God owns Messiah as God, and even when grace adds companions of His people, He is anointed as man above them all. He that sanctifies and they that are sanctified are all of one, and to be manifested in the same heavenly glory. But some who seem to begin well stop short or turn aside. It was faith of mere mind and feeling, not the Holy Spirit's living work in the conscience; and such in the strain of trial, or weary of habitual self-judgment, or turning again to the mirth and pleasant enjoyments of the world, abandon first the path and then the word and the name of Christ. The dangers of the Hebrew confessors found its parallel in their fathers' snares during the journeyings of the wilderness, and we now in Christendom are exposed to like danger. The possession of the heavenly privileges is evidenced and conditioned by holding stedfast to the end the beginning of the assurance of the Christian.

How then say some who assume to teach that it is presumption to have any such “assurance”? For the assurance here insisted on as proper, incumbent, and necessary from first to last is grounded on the glorified Lord Jesus, our propitiation and our high, priest, on the divine dignity of His person and the accepted efficacy of His work for us, leading, as He undertook, many sons to glory. One can hardly therefore find doctrine more opposed to the gospel than a preliminary denial of that assurance which every Christian is solemnly exhorted, not merely to have but to hold fast, yea firm to the end. If assurance be founded on anything in ourselves, the sooner the better to abandon what was really self-righteous and unbecoming and spurious. The confidence which dispenses with continued dependence on God is worthless and a delusion of the enemy. But if we rest on Him by faith, we are bound to have and cherish by faith what is only His due. And it may be that the Hellenistic sense of “confidence,” while certain from the usage of Polybius (4:54, 10; 5:16, 4; 6:55, 2; Diod. Sic., etc.), as cited in modern commentaries, flows from its primitive meaning of subsistence, substance, and the like. Compare Heb. 4:3; Heb. 11:1. It points strongly to an objective base in the Christ, instead of a mere sentiment in the soul which might easily change and fade away. But the Spirit, where there is life, keeps believers true to the Lord.

Doubtless “today” is a serious and trying time (verse 15). We are in the wilderness, and without God what is there but difficulty and danger for His people, weak as spilt water in themselves? But there especially He speaks in His word; and even when the kingdom comes, the prophetic word calls His own to hear His voice. If

they were bitterly provoking, He was patient and gracious. And if there be difference now, as there is assuredly, since Christ accomplished redemption, and took His seat at God's right hand, and sent down the Holy Spirit to be in us who believe, it is still said, "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation." What He has done and revealed and made ours, so transcending all wrought of old in Egypt and the desert, ought to be the most powerful stimulus, as well as firm foundation, in heeding His revealed will against our treacherous hearts, so sure to grow hard if we slight His word or tamper with sin. "Today" is till Jesus comes, the point so constant in N.T. expectation. Is He your expectation, my brother?

"For who on hearing did provoke? Nay, did not all who came out of Egypt through Moses?" (verse 16).

The A.V. followed the indefinite pronoun, not the interrogative as is here preferred with the R.V. Thus the appeal has all force. It was not "some" only but the mass, as is put immediately afterwards, a shameful answer to Jehovah's favour toward Israel. And it is of painful interest to observe how the Spirit employs the same scenes with yet more detail in 1 Cor. 10 to warn the Gentile faithful at Corinth, as here for the Jewish. What made the case so grave is that it was after they heard they fell into the provocation. So sin is worse far in a baptised man than in a mere Jew or Gentile; and the idolatry of Mary or Peter or an angel worse in the sight of God than that of Zeus or Venus. "All that came out of Egypt by Moses!" O what power, judicial and delivering, had they not witnessed! What continual goodness and withal solemn dealings with rebellion and profanity! The Christian profession is admonished to beware of similar

departure. “And with whom was He displeased forty years? Was it not with those that sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness?” (verse 17.) It was no mere sudden slip, but the grave evil of habitual state that aroused His strong displeasure; alas! the whole period of His unparalleled intervention in the wilderness, where their stay gave occasion to His constant and wondrous tokens of mercy before all eyes. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, or walk in obedience, holiness, and love. Without it there is but sin continually; as they sinned, and their carcases fell. For God is not mocked, nor His righteous government which was then visibly displayed.

“And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to the disobedient?” (verse 18.) Disobedience, and above all disobedience such as this, God abhors and judges. It is not meant in isolated acts, but insubjection to Himself; just the opposite of what Rom. 1 calls the obedience of faith, now especially as He has in grace revealed Himself in the lord Jesus. It is yet deeper than obedience to His commands, however important this may be in its place, and the proof not only of love but of divinely characterised faith, and therefore of life in Christ Such as are insubmissive to Himself, especially now that the Son has declared Him, shall assuredly not enter into the rest of God, the heavenly glory at Christ’s coming. So He swore then; as His wrath is now revealed from heaven against all such ungodliness, even if after a sort they hold the truth ever so fast in unrighteousness.

The next verse closes this portion with a word on the root of the evil thus disclosed. “And we see that they could not enter in on account of unbelief” (verse 19).

Their having disobeyed God in the sense of hearkening not to His word, and thus of insubjection to Himself, pointed to their inward unbelief. Present, palpable, visible things were their all. God was in none of their thoughts really; for it is no question of idle dreamy sentiment but of spiritual life. How could unbelief or those marked by it enter His blessed glorious rest?

11 Text. Rec. follows the later copies, as they with the Septuagint add me and read ἐδοκίμασάν με. The more ancient give the text adopted in this version. A similar remark applies to “this” rather than “that” as in the common text.

12 Ibid.

Hebrews 4

The all-important point for a just interpretation is that God's rest is here before us, His glory with Christ. It is not at all rest for the conscience or for the heart, which the believer has or Ends now in Christ. "The rest of God" is exclusively future.

The perfect word of God distinguishes even outwardly what may be and ought to be now enjoyed from what is only in hope, however sure. Our Lord in Matt. 11:, 28, 29, speaks of what His grace makes good while we are here; Heb. 3, 4, only of what the believers enter at His coming. Hence ἀνάπαυσις is the word for rest in the Gospel, κατάπαυσις in the Epistle. Jesus, rejected as Messiah, does not only fall back on the heavenly and universal glory He looks for as the Son of Man, but unveils Himself as the Son of the Father, and invites to Himself all that labour and are burdened. To those that come to Him the Son gives rest. It is free and sovereign grace, present and full relief from the toil of law and the burden of sin. This rest He gives to conscience, the starting-point by faith to all holiness. But He also adds, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls." This is rest for the heart of the Christian day by day, and found only in obedience. It is not help, as men say, nor peace exactly, but rest of heart in the submissive acceptance of God's will. So Christ Himself bowed and was blessed here below so all that follow Him. But He gives rest to the conscience (without here explaining how) before we find rest for our souls in judging self and doing God's will.

Faith makes both our own now; but we are called also to exult in hope of the glory of God. This is His rest; and we are going on toward it, as Israel to Canaan. Such is the text here applied. It is God resting in what satisfies His love and holiness, when righteousness reigns and sorrow flees away, κατάπαυσις being stronger than ἀνάπαυσις. The former is applied in Gen. 2 (Lxx.) when sin and death had not yet entered the world. It is used here also for the scene and time of glory, when they will be manifestly vanquished.

“Let us fear therefore lest, a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short. For indeed we have had good tidings borne to us, as they also [had]; but the word of the report did not profit them, not having been mixed with faith in those that heard” (verses 1-2).

It is impossible to understand the entire context, if we regard the rest here spoken of as any other than the future rest of God into which Christ will introduce us at His coming. Wrest it to the primary need of the soul as men are apt to do, and all is confusion. Would the Spirit say, “let us fear” if it were a question of believing in Christ to all joy and peace? The word of the Lord to the troubled soul is “Fear not”; “I will: be thou clean”; “Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace;” “Daughter, be of good comfort,” and the like: never a syllable to induce a doubt of the Saviour’s grace, or of the believer’s salvation. For indeed He came to seek and save that which is lost. But here the warning is given to those that bear His name who, like Israel, were stopping short and weary of the pilgrimage through the wilderness. There is danger on all sides. It may be the desire to go back into Egypt, or despairing of Canaan — the pleasant land, and

murmuring against Moses and Aaron meanwhile. In every case it is unbelief; and Israel paid the penalty. “Let us therefore fear lest, a promise having been left of entering into His rest any one of you should seem to have fallen short.”

Fallen unbelieving man is ever in quest of this or that. He is restless, and knows no happiness (or rather, pleasure) in this world but change, the pursuit of what he has not but wishes to have. Had he the gift of God’s love, the water that Christ gives would be in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life, of which he drinking shall never thirst again. Even so he needs to have always before his heart that heaven to which he now belongs, his new fatherland, where Christ is gone before. If Israel had a hope, we have assuredly no less, but in far richer measure and brighter light. The hope of the future according to God has a mighty effect in delivering from the power of present things opposed to Him. The renewed heart needs it and has it clearly set before us in Scripture as here. Let us fear therefore lest anyone of us should seem to come short in this respect. What is destructive where there is no faith is injurious, and may be so to the last degree, to the believer. Therefore do we hear of “seeming” to have come short. There is no rest of God now, nor for us is it here but in heaven. Let us fear even the appearance of settling down on earth; which indeed is not our rest or hope.

Hope was natural to a Jew’s feeling and expectation, especially if Messiah were come. But He is rejected, gone up, and is glorified on high. There with Him will be our rest, and what is far better, the rest of God. Let none of us (for surely it is no less true and weighty, for the Gentile believer) — let none of us seem to have come

short of that rest. The Christian Jew was in nothing behind his fathers; if the elders had good tidings, those who cleave to Christ in heaven had yet more. But if the word be not mixed with faith, it can no more profit the hearer now than of old. Then the fathers saw wonders and heard the Voice more awful than thunder or earthquake; yet they fell through unbelief, and disobedience its effect. So now, when it is no question of sight or sound, the word mixed with faith for those that heard is indispensable: else the ruin is still more irretrievable than falling in the wilderness.

I am aware that the mass of ancient MSS. favours the strange reading adopted by the Revisers, as well as by most modern critics, “because they were not united by faith with them that heard.” So almost all the uncials and cursives and many ancient versions. Here I cannot but agree with Tischendorf that the Sinai MS. () is right, as are a few cursives, the Peschito Syriac, and some good copies of the Vulgate, etc. The externally best-supported reading seems hardly sense, if not wrong doctrine. And this is no solitary instance.

The rest then is God’s rest, made by Him, and suited to Him, which He will enjoy in perfected glory with those who believe in Christ, who alone by His work could fit sinful men to share it, perfected as they are through His one offering.

“For we that believed enter into the rest, even as he hath said, As I swore in my wrath, If they shall enter into my rest, although the works were done from [the] world’s foundation. For he hath said somewhere of the seventh day thus, And God rested on the seventh day

from all his works, and in this again, If they shall enter into my rest" (verses 3-5).

The present tense of verse 3 is not historical but absolute, a usage most frequent in Scripture and in ordinary speech too, especially as to principles of truth. Believers are the enterers into the rest of glory: not all men, nor yet all Israel, but "we that believed"; for the past participle adds to the definiteness of the class accepted for the blessing, not simply those who believe as if they might later or when they pleased. There is no thought of an actual entrance now; for the whole argument shows the rest here is future, whatever rest may be for faith to apprehend before God shares His rest with all that are His own. This Epistle always regards the believer as on the way. The sabbatism here in view is not yet enjoyed by the saints, but "remaineth" (verse g). It is for those that believed, and none else. Of those that did not believe, how true it was, as God swore to give it all the greater solemnity and assurance, that they should not enter into His rest! Their unbelief of Christ made it conditional on themselves; and they were ungodly, as all such are and must be. For Christ only is the source of life as well as forgiveness, the one strengthener of the weak and guide of the erring, the sole Saviour either of sinners or of saints. For what could even saints be or do without Him? As unbelievers trust themselves or certainly do not trust Christ, they shall not enter into the rest of God. The "if" is their death-knell. If self is the sinner's condition, it is all over with him; and as with Israel, it is no less sure in Christendom. "If they shall enter into my rest," practically as in principle for those who know what unbelief is, means that they shall not.

Yet God had revealed His rest from the beginning. Only the Adamic world is spoken of, only those “works” of God which were effected on the six “days.” The vast operations of creation in geologic time are outside consideration and have nothing to do directly with His rest. But His works in view of man immediately conduct to it. Therefore it is said in Gen. 2, “And God rested on. the seventh day from all his works,” as He had in Psalm 95 thousands of years after, “If they shall enter into my rest.” The first scripture proves that He had a rest Himself the second, that even His people had not yet entered into it. Sin came in for Adam and his race at the beginning. God could not rest in sin, nor could sinners as such enter into God’s rest. God indeed did not then speak of any entering in. But He did, in thus speaking, imply that the unbelievers who provoked Him in the wilderness should not enter. Preferring self to Christ they, as all like them, must reap the ruinous consequence. And this He records in a psalm which not only recalls the ruin of the rebellious people in the desert, but looks on to the future day of glory when Israel are invited to come with songs of joy and thanksgiving before Jehovah, not only the Creator (as the gods were not, but mere demons and impostors) but their Maker and God. They having believed at length, after ages of judgment because of their unbelief, shall enter into His rest. How welcome and sweet for that people, His people, after such a history of sorrow, shame, and unrest, through sin and the unbelief that barred all escape or deliverance! For “today” will be then, not merely a persevering call of grace (as more pre-eminently in the gospel), but God’s power in salvation; “and so all Israel shall be saved” in that day.

“Since then it remaineth that some should enter into it, and that those that had first good tidings borne did not enter because of disobedience, again he defineth a certain day, saying, Today in David after so long a time, even as it hath been said before, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Joshua made them rest, he would not have spoken after these things of another day. There remaineth therefore a sabbatism for the people of God. For he that entered into his rest, himself also rested from his works, as God from his own” (verses 6-10).

The inference is drawn that some would hear and believe, whilst the mass were unbelieving and perished; and both were verified in the type: Israel fell as a whole; Joshua and Caleb entered Canaan. It was a sad issue then with which grace would point the moral to the Jews that professed the name of the Lord, and indeed to any now in Christendom. God’s mercy would not be hindered by human opposition or indifference. If those first appealed to refused the glad tidings, He persists in calling He again fixes a day, and in David, long after Moses and Joshua, “Today” is the word (as it has been said) “Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” He is coming, and Israel will not harden their hearts in that day, but will say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. But the Christian and the church now say, Come, for they at least have proved His infinite grace. They dread not, but long for His presence. But withal the call goes on to the unbelieving while He tarries. For He is a Saviour as well as their Bridegroom (Rev. 22).

It is impossible to maintain that Israel’s entry into Canaan was God’s rest or man’s entrance into it. The

failure is as evident in Canaan as in Eden. Neither was His rest. But in that reasoning His word is definitive. Long after Joshua made Israel rest in the land, God by David speaks of His rest not yet realised, as sure to be lost by unbelief as of old, as open to faith as ever — we may say now in the gospel more than ever; but this is scarcely the object in this part of the Epistle. It is a final call to the people, and a solemn warning against unbelief to such of them as called on the Lord Jesus. Whatever measure of rest Joshua then gave Israel, it was not the rest of God, for this in David is still held out prospectively. There remains therefore a sabbath-keeping for the people of God.

So in Rom. 8 we are said to be saved by hope, for the salvation spoken of goes beyond the soul, taking in the body (verses 11, 23) and creation generally (verses 19 et seqq.). But hope, says the apostle, that is seen is not hope; for who hopeth for that which he sees? But if we hope for that which we see not, we do with patience wait for it. It is thus with the rest God will have prepared for those that love Him, where even He can see no flaw, and which, when all work is done, He will give us to enjoy with Himself. Hence it is wholly future., it remains for His people, whether for those above or for those below. For Christ is the Heir of all things, and we are joint-heirs with Him. All things in heaven and all things on earth are to be under Him, not in title only by personal exaltation at God’s right hand, but by actual possession in indisputable and acknowledged power when He reigns on His own throne. Such is the rest of God, as His word presents it, but alas! many that bear Christ’s name feebly believe if at all. It is as sure as His

death, which is the ground of hope as of so much else infinitely precious; and shown carefully in Heb. 2.

No present rest then is the rest of God — and the futurity of that rest is a grand safeguard against the snare for any Christian, most of all for a Jewish one, to seek it now here below. As God cannot rest in sin or misery, neither ought we to allow it even in our desires, still less make it our life. Now is the time for the labour of love if we know His love, now to seek true worshippers of the Father as He is seeking Himself: as the Son loved to do here below, so the Spirit does now sent down from heaven. Thus should we show that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son downward and all around in grace, as upward in praise and thanksgiving; while we wait for the rest of God to come, and this when it comes is everlasting.

Verse 10 is an added word very characteristic of the inspired writer. It asserts the general principle, by the case put, that we cannot be working and have rest in the same things and in the same sense. When one is entered into his rest, he also has rested from his works. It is not at all the common notion of resting from bad works when a man gets peace with God. However true this may be, it has nothing whatever to do with what is here written. And this is demonstrable, not only from the whole passage treating, not of the soul’s spiritual rest by faith of Jesus but of God’s future rest in glory, yet by the comparison that follows, as God from His own (works). Now assuredly His works were never bad, but always and perfectly good. Nevertheless He is to rest even from the activity of His love to enjoy the glorious results. Such is the case spoken of. He that is entered into his rest is no longer busied with his works. It is a necessary

principle and a blessed application to the matter in hand, and in no way a moralising on a sinner ceasing from his evil works and finding rest in Christ. Now is the time for the saint not to cease from his good works. Soon he will enter the eternal rest of God. The prevalence of sin and misery calls for unremitting labour while it is day; in this too we have communion with the Father and the Son (John 5:17). When they rest, so shall we; and eternity, as the active Arnauld d'Andilly said to Nicole, will be long enough to rest in. The A.V. is very faulty in its mistaken emphasis, which helps on the popular misapprehension.

The eleventh verse concludes the caution against present rest for the Christian, followed by a statement of the means grace supplies to safeguard us through the wilderness.

"Let us therefore be diligent to enter into that rest,13 that no one fall into the same example of disobedience. For the word of God [is] living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing to dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and a discerner of thoughts and intents of [the] heart. And there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things [are] naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (verses 11-13).

We are exhorted to earnest striving now; for there is much that invites us to ease and relaxation. The very mercy of God to our souls might so dispose us, especially if brought up in a previous school of legal thought. For deep and full is the peace with God into which faith in Christ introduces; and so much the more is it enjoyed, if we have been toiling to better our case

by self-denying efforts and a round of religious observances. Immense is the deliverance from bondage and doubt and dimness by the simple yet profound gospel of God. Yet the danger of reaction is not small. We are saved that we may diligently serve Him. We are put into fellowship with God's feelings as to all that surrounds us as well as what surrounds Him. This is not our rest, but our scene of labour where people and things are estranged from God. We shall rest when we enter what is perfectly according to His nature and purpose. Hence now and here below is the strongest call to diligence, not to rest. The rest for our conscience sets us the more free to labour in presence of sin, misery, and death. For we are now by faith in the secret of God, and our eyes are opened to discern the deceptions of the enemy. The world no longer appears a pleasant place, 'but the great snare to hinder progress and to turn from the glory of God where Christ is. It is the scene of His rejection and sufferings; it had the guilt of crucifying Him. And from this guilt no one is purged, save by faith of His blood which brings us nigh to God, whose love too calls us to be witnesses of Christ to sinners and saints, as our Lord was when here.

Let us then be diligent to enter into that rest, refusing every other. Israel is the great example of falling through not hearkening to the Lord. This is the fatal disobedience here spoken of. They stumbled at the word, being disobedient. And such is the danger of all Christians now, as well as of those immediately addressed. We stop short, grow weary, make difficulties, get preoccupied, distracted from God's objects, attracted by things that are seen and temporal. We are

called now to the work of faith and labour of love, while we patiently wait for rest in glory at Christ's coming.

Unbelief may work in us as in Israel as to both the way and the end. They were weary of the one, and they despised the other. Let us take heed that none of us fall into the same example of disobedience. Therefore had that generation, instead of going peacefully into the inheritance of Jehovah, to wander forty years in the wilderness that the unbelievers might fall, and a generation to come be led into the goodly land.

The word of God is the needed correction, as we see it here. Indeed it is the revelation of God to the soul. Hence it is spoken of in terms which so approach the person of Christ that many take the language here as pointing to Him. And beyond doubt there is the closest connection between the word written or spoken and the Word personal. Scripture habitually has Christ as its object direct or indirect, for it may be an analogy of contrast as well as of resemblance, as we see in Adam or Aaron, David or Solomon, or any other person or thing spoken of, as the Epistle largely exemplifies.

Now it is the flesh, self in one form or another, which, when unjudged, exposes to falling in the wilderness. If we walked in the Spirit as we live in it, we should be kept straight and go forward. For the Holy Spirit ever glorifies Christ, and acts by the word in us, as Christ when here lived by the word. It is the true path of dependence and obedience, which glorifies the God who gave it. So the Lord defeated the enemy and did the will of God. Nor was it so only in the activity of His blessed life; but not less, yea, much more, in that death which pre-eminently accomplished the will and word of God.

And we are now following His steps in the same world which hated and cast Him out. As here we are kept by the power of God through faith, so it is His word that acts on and in us by the Holy Spirit. For this alone applies to us the revelation of God's nature as seen in Christ, which nourishes the life we have received in Christ, and detects the working in us of all that is outside the life which would dishonour God and would defile and endanger us. "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword." There is no instrument so exquisitely keen and cutting to deal with what is opposed to the mind and grace and holy purpose of God about us.

Therefore do the true-hearted 'believers welcome the application of its edge; for, if not pleasant to nature, it is profitable to us and due to God. As we are further told, it penetrates "even to dividing, of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and capable of judging heart's thoughts and intents." No word of man has any such effect. It may be instructive, or pathetic, or alarming to say nothing of its lighter qualities; but the word of God has the energy of its source and its own unmistakable character. It arrests the conscience, it sounds the heart, so that feelings and motives can no longer be hid. Christ, its great theme, shines as the True Light and makes everything manifest that is not like Himself. And how much there is in that horrid thing, self, which was never for an instant in Him!

Thus God's word acts "to dividing of soul and spirit," two things so closely allied and so resembling as to yield to no other discriminating means. "Of both joints and marrow" seems to be a figure of close physical conjunction, which are beyond the reach of human

instrument, as “soul and spirit” still more impalpably. It is possible that both phrases go beyond severing one from the other, and mean that each is pierced by the word of God as nothing else could. For it is the life of the Spirit, and in no way an instrument of death, save to that which it expels as foreign and evil.

The word of God is also said to be able to discern “heart’s thoughts and intents.” Every working within the heart is thereby judged. There is no sparing of our own will. This the believer can hail, having a new nature which hates evil and feels according to Christ, the only One who, though man, never did His own will, and who is applied as a test and pattern. Thoughts before they are articulated in word, intents not yet reaching action, are sifted and vanish. Now where spiritual integrity exists, this is just what is wanted and desired; for we, from our new birth, are sanctified by the Spirit to the obedience of Christ; nor could it be otherwise, if Christ be our life. For life is prompt to act according to its nature, as we cannot fail to see, even in the bent of any animal according to its kind. Only in our case we have still the old Adam in us, which is never good and in the Christian to be always refused, now that we have a new and eternal life in Christ, which alone the Spirit exercises and directs, strengthens and cheers.

Even an O.T. saint ignorant of the superior power and privilege of the gospel could say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24). How much more should we not welcome that word which makes it good in us! The germs of mischief are thus detected and destroyed; what can be more gracious, though the probe

may be sharp? It is just because we are redeemed out of Egypt, but not yet in that rest where all will be according to the perfect love and glory of God. We are still in the view of this Epistle journeying through the desert, where God in His goodness is proving us to know and let us know what is in our heart. It may be humbling, but nothing can be more wholesome.

The final words are very impressive. “And there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things [are] naked and laid open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” This is exactly what unbelief hates and shirks at all cost; anything but the presence of God, and the consciousness of all out undisguisedly and without reserve in His sight. How much there is that we fail to discern within us! Self-love, will, haste, zeal, constantly tend to blind us. He with whom we have to do acts in His absolute knowledge of all, and uses this or that to discover what is the moving spring or the hidden aim. Not only in vain is the snare set in the sight of any bird, but we have the comfortable certainty of God as it were speaking, to us, and this in the most safe and solemn manner; for He has magnified His word above all His name. Those who slight His word, treating it as dead and powerless, unless you have an erring, man to enforce it, forget that we have to do with a living God, who abounds toward us in suited helps and mercies even in this day of weakness, declension, and scattering. And if all other things and persons fail, He cannot, but watches over us in a holy love that acts for His own glory. His word puts us morally before Him when His eyes deal with our consciences. And as there is not a creature hidden from Him, all things are bare and laid open to His eyes with whom we have to do. It is

verifying in us now what manifestation before Christ's tribunal will do perfectly by-and-by; and the effect is to deliver from settling down into a present rest of our own, that we may pursue our pilgrim path and labour of love, intent on His rest in glory to come.

The word of God, above all price and powerful though it be, is not the only declared means for our safe conduct through the wilderness. No instrument is so effectual to sift and deal with not outward ways only but all that is of man. Yet we need and have far more: even the active grace of Christ's priesthood, occupied with us in every sorrow and trial of our pilgrimage.

"Having then a great high priest passed as he is14 through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession. For we have not a high priest unable to sympathise with our infirmities, but having been tempted in all things in like manner apart from sin. Let us then approach with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for seasonable help" (verses 14-16).

It is not surprising that Tyndale made Hebrews 5 to begin with three verses which ordinarily conclude Hebrews 4. For such is their direct connection. Nevertheless, following up as they do the power of the word in detecting the flesh even in its subtlest forms, which is the death of the spirit practically, one can understand their more usual position.

Here the "great high priest" is presented in His normal position, not exceptionally as in Heb. 2:17. That extraordinary action, the effecting of propitiation, was the basis of all for God's glory and man's salvation; but here we have the only due place of His intercessional

functions. We see Him gone on through the heavens, not simply “entered,” as in all the old English versions, save Wiclif who adhering to the Vulgate was here kept fairly right. Christ’s immense superiority to Aaron and his succession is thus set out for the Christian’s assurance. Hence is the great High Priest enabled most effectually to meet our every need, He being before God evermore on high, we encompassed with infirmity in the wilderness, and exposed to trial, danger, and sorrow. But it is the same “Jesus the Son of God,” who made purification of the sins He bore in His body on the tree, before He set Himself down on God’s right hand. The question of our slavery and guilt is therefore settled everlastingly for all that believe; as there was no claim of Egypt or its prince on Israel after passing through the Red Sea.

Yet the wilderness was full of snares and perils, as is our Christian path through the world. Only we, in a higher meaning and the fullest sense, are the redeemed of the Lord, needing no more for the soul’s redemption, and awaiting that of the body at His coming. Still we are here in this wilderness, with nothing but the dreary barren sand if we have not God with us. Therefore to sustain us and sympathise with us in our weakness He has given us a great High Priest, whose love to us we have already proved when there was nothing, to love in us, whose blood cleansed us from every sin, whose death and resurrection set us free, and raised an impassable barrier against our old enemies to be seen again no more for ever. We are not of the world, as Christ was not, slaves of Satan never more through His victory.

But we are not Yet as He is in the heavenly land. We are journeying through the dry and howling wilderness, and

though we are not in the flesh (Rom. 8:9) but in the Spirit as the Spirit dwells in us, none the less the flesh is in us ever ready to listen to the tempter, if our eyes be not set on Christ so as to walk after the Spirit. Hence the all-importance of our blessed Saviour for us on high, to which the presence of the Holy Spirit in us answers here below. Without both we should fall in the wilderness, as in it all flesh is judged and perishes. Nor do we as saints want sympathy with the evil thing in us. We have learnt to discern it by the word of God, and to hate the mind of the flesh as enmity against God and death. We have learnt too, that self and will are always and only evil; and therefore by grace we sit in judgment on ourselves, as now able each to say, “I am crucified with Christ, and live no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that which I now live in flesh, I live by faith in [lit., of] the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal. 2).

Here then we now need constant vigilance and prayer, as we submit to that word which divinely scrutinises us and calls us to cut off every snare. But we have His gracious oversight where it is of chiefest efficacy, who feels for and with us, the Sanctifier with the sanctified, in every difficulty, danger, and suffering, as at the commandment of God we halt or march. But the cloud of the divine direction, however precious, is not enough, nor the warning or winning and cheering voices of the silver trumpets. We need a living person, inflexible for God’s glory, unerring as to God’s will, unfailing in gracious power for us in our weakness and exposure; and all this we have, and incalculably more, in Jesus the Son of God passed through the heavens as a great High Priest. He is man as truly as you or any. He was not

alone perfectly man but the perfect man. He knows therefore by experience what the world is, what Satan is; but that evil in the flesh, which He by His supernatural birth never had, He by dependence on God never let in for a moment. “The Holy Thing” born of Mary, He was and ever lived the Holy One of God.

Hence Him only could God make sin for us on the cross that we might become God’s righteousness in Him. Hence now as the ever-living, High Priest He is exactly and exclusively the One to intercede for us and to sympathise with us. Had there been (I say not the blasphemy of sin or failure on His part, but) ever so little of what Scripture calls the mind of flesh or indwelling sin in Him, it would have both tainted fatally the offering for sin and blunted that heart of holy love from its sympathies with us in our desires and opposition by, the Spirit against the flesh. But there was absolutely none. Taking part in blood and flesh as we had both, in Him was no sin as in us there is: not merely no acts, but no root, of evil. Satan found nothing in Him (John 14:30), nor God (Psalm 17:3). Therefore could He die effectually for our sins and for sin; therefore does He live to plead no less efficaciously for us and sympathise with our infirmities. Death, and His death alone, could avail against sin; and God has accepted it in the fullest way, setting Jesus (who glorified Him in all things and in this the deepest of all) at His own right hand, and sending down His Spirit that we might know His estimate of its effectual value for us now and henceforth and for ever.

But we want One who lives and every moment interests Himself in all our difficulties and weakness as now living to God in an evil world, and not yet divested of that evil principle, the mind of the flesh, which was never in Him

but in us. This draws out for us His sympathies so much the more, because we have not only to resist Satan as He alone did perfectly, but an inward enemy, or traitor which He had not. And He is absolutely competent, being God and Man in one person, and this after Himself treading all the way through as completely as none else ever did or could in heaven or earth. For us then, passed as He is through the heavens, He pleads and feels with us perfectly. “Let us then hold fast the confession.” Such is the demand and the cry of the new man against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Had the Son of God been simply above the heavens, there could have been no such motive to simply hold fast, no such comfort in our trials as Christians. But here He lived, suffered, and died, knowing each and all as no one else ever did or can but Jesus the Son of God. Hence He was fitted, being man, and of unrivalled experience. He is able as none else to sympathise, not with our sins which as saints we dare not seek but most heartily repudiate, but with our infirmities. Not even a Paul, who gloried in these (certainly not in sins!) could do without His sympathy. Nay, it was because he knew and appreciated His sympathy so much better than we, that he could exult when we are too often depressed. It is not however in flesh or on the earth that He exercises these functions for us, but as passed through the heavens where neither sin nor infirmity can ever come. Thus does He bear us up, and with tenderest feeling for us, for each as truly as if none other existed to share it, being God no less than man. To allow a priest on earth, yea, to conceive Him such, is to judaise. Save for the wholly different work of laying the foundation of all in atonement, His priestly work is exclusively on high, as

we are partakers of a heavenly calling, and are called to hold fast that confession and none other.

But in order to such a priesthood Jesus had been tempted in all things in like manner, sin excepted. Here we need to be on our guard. For the foisting in of “yet” in the last clause is apt to convey a notion wholly contrary to the truth and most derogatory to Christ. Most readers would gather thence that, though Christ was in all points tempted like as we are, yet He never sinned. Now one may boldly affirm that this is altogether short of the true meaning, and indeed quite another thought, so as to miss the mind of God in the passage. It is not sins or failures excepted, but “apart from sin.” We have evil temptations from within, from fallen humanity; Christ had none. This was absolutely incompatible with His holy person. By a miracle He was even as to humanity exempt from taint of evil, as no one else was since the fall. And it is of these holy temptations that the Epistle to the Hebrews treats, not of our unholy ones. The Epistle of James distinguishes them very definitely in James 1. Compare verses 2, 12, on the one hand and verses 13-19 on the other. We know the latter too well, Jesus never. But He knew the former as no other before or since. He was in all things tempted according to likeness i.e. with us, with this infinite difference, “sin apart.” He knew no sin, He had no inward sinful temptation. He is therefore the more, not the less, able to sympathise with us. For sin within, even if not yielded to, blinds the eye and dulls the heart, and hinders from unreserved occupation with the trials of others.

Having then such tender and efficacious intervention in our ever-living Intercessor at God’s right hand, we are exhorted to draw near with boldness to the throne of

grace. Carefully observe that it is not coming to Christ to plead for us, which supposes a soul not at ease before God and doubting the grace in which we who believe habitually stand through redemption. Christ did not go on high till all was cleared for us on earth, and ourselves, as we know from John 20, placed in the enjoyment of His own relationship with His Father and His God (His Deity of course always excepted), children and saints quickened together with Him, being forgiven all our trespasses (Col. 2:13). “Let us approach therefore with all boldness unto the throne of grace.” This is what we now need and have.

We are entitled thus to come with all boldness to God on His throne. To us, through the redemption of Christ, it is a throne of grace. Early in the Revelation we see a throne whence the expressions of judgment proceed. Toward the close it is a throne of glory, the throne of God and of the Lamb, whence issues a river of life clear as crystal; so will it be known after the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife has prepared herself. Need we add the solemnity of the great white throne of everlasting judgment The throne of grace, though of the same God, has a totally different character toward the many sons that are being brought to glory.

To this then we are now told to approach with all boldness. Some prefer what they call “a humble hope.” But this is mere human sentiment or worse. In ourselves we have no ground even for the faintest hope; if we have Christ by faith, we wrong both His work and God’s grace, now righteously and perfectly vindicated, if we do not approach with all boldness to the throne of grace. Is this to exaggerate the word of God? or is not that unbelieving? Alas, the unbelief of believers!

Observe what the aim is when we thus approach: “that we may receive mercy and find grace for seasonable help.” Our weakness needs this mercy; and God’s pleasure is that we, engaged with the difficulties of the way, may find grace for seasonable help. He sits there and invites thus that we may depend on Him for help in good time. Having such a Priest let us approach the throne of grace boldly. God and His Son Are pledged to bless us, as also we can look to Him without doubt or fear. Such is His word, no less than His will.

13 I had overlooked the late Dean Alford’s adoption of objections to the evidently trite sense of verse 10, which led to the idea that it means Christ entering God’s rest. But it is an error that the aorist has really a perfect force in the former case, It is ethical and suitable as an aphorism.

14 I know not how better to represent two things apt to be overlooked; the absence of the article and the perfect tense of the participle. “Who,” or “That” hath passed implies the article and is designative “Passed” simply would answer to the aorist.

Hebrews 5

We now enter on the main doctrinal development of the Epistle, the detailed comparison of the priesthood of Christ with that of Aaron, pursued with collateral truths to the middle of Hebrews 10. The aim evidently is to prove the incontestable superiority of Christ in this as in every other point of view. It was of the utmost moment for such confessors of His name as were Jews; it is of scarcely less importance for souls accustomed to the traditions and practices of Christendom, where an order of officials has been set up, not always sacerdotal in name but ever tending to fall back on that Aaronic order, though according to God it grew old and vanished away when the substance was established for ever in Christ by redemption.

“For every high priest, taken as he is from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining unto God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins, being able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is compassed with infirmity; and on account of this he ought, even as for the people, so also for himself also to offer for sins. And no one taketh the honour to himself but when called by God even as Aaron also” (verses 1-4).

The description is general, but with Aaron in view in order to bring in the glorious contrast of Christ. This has not always been seen, and the consequence is often disastrous. Such an oversight is inexcusable, because God has clearly revealed the infinite dignity of Christ’s person and the grace of His work. Were these foundations of the faith held fast, they afford an

invaluable safeguard for souls. Where it is not so, what is there to preserve from error of the deadliest kind? Christ is the truth. This scripture upholds Him, as the Holy Spirit is here to glorify Him and will never be a consenting party to His dishonour. And the Father's love is never tasted otherwise. For His complacency was ever there, and especially expressed to Him as man on earth, that we who believe in Christ might hear the Son and have fellowship with the Father no less than with Him.

Assuredly Christ is only viewed as priest, and only became such after the assumption of manhood, and indeed much more. As little can it be questioned that He entered on that office for the partakers of the heavenly calling, to sympathise with them, as well as appear and intercede for them in God's presence. But the language here employed does not refer to Him; rather is it to give point, by way of contrast as a whole, with that earthly priesthood whose highest representative was Aaron. Hence the language, however comprehensive, leaves out what is most distinctive of Christ, and expresses a ground in verse 2 and a consequence in verse 3 which faith ought to have regarded as intolerable in His case, because it is opposed to the truth of both His person and His work. The fact is that it is simply every case of human high priesthood which is set before us here, and not that of Christ, which follows subsequently and is placed in marked contradistinction. Indeed the basis laid at the beginning of the Epistle refutes the inclusion of Christ; for He is carefully shown to be Son of God as well as Son of man. His divine glory is carefully maintained from the first and throughout. It is this, as well as the accomplishment of redemption, that gives infinite efficacy to His office no less than to His sacrifice.

The opening verses of our chapter therefore set out the ordinary requirements of any and every high priest, however truly the Lord may have possessed some and superseded others by His surpassing and unique dignity. The real aim is to evince the necessary inferiority of a human high priest, great as the privilege was in divine things, even if the high priest were Aaron the most honoured of all; and thus to enhance the incomparable glory of Christ's high priesthood.

Every high priest was "taken from among men." This would be most inadequate if applied to Christ, but perfectly true of Aaron and his successors. They were but men, though taken from among them. So to speak of the Lord is to forget who He is. The Word was made flesh. He became man, but God He was and is from everlasting to everlasting, the Eternal. An angel had been wholly unsuited, and is only employed in prophetic vision when the object is to express distance without losing the fact of priesthood, as in Rev. 8: But in fact, a high priest was of necessity a man, though taken from among men. He was to represent man before God, and to represent God before men. His appointment was on behalf of men in things relating to God, and more definitely to "offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." What a meagre statement, if Christ were in view, who gave Himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour! It is, on the contrary, precise and full if the inspired writer were treating only of human high priesthood as distinguished from that of Christ.

Still more evident is the other side of high priestly functions, "being able to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, since he himself also is

compassed with infirmity.” He can feel and make considerate allowance for the ignorant and erring, being no more than a weak man himself, whatever be the exalted character of his office; he himself also is beset round about with infirmity. How true this is of every high priest without qualification needs no proof. But what guards and limitations and reserves are necessary if a believer essays to bring Christ within the range! That the Son deigned to become man is truth only secondary to His being God, perfectly man and perfect man. That He knew hunger, thirst, weariness, is certain, that He was crucified in (or of) weakness15 is so revealed to us. Were this or its like that which is conveyed here, none ought to hesitate; for it is a wrong to the truth to detract from His real humanity, as of course from His proper deity. But to my mind the passage speaks of a mere man, such as every other high priest is necessarily, and grounds his ability to exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring on his own besetment with weakness; whereas, when He is without doubt referred to, He is spoken of as “Jesus the Son of God” and thus shown in the power of divine nature and relationship, though partaking of ours to sympathise with us fully, in fact tempted in all things after a like manner with the momentous exception of sin. Of that class of temptation He had absolutely none, as it was incompatible with the integrity and holiness of His person as well as the efficacy and acceptance of His work.

But what absolutely precludes and expels this loose, erroneous, and Christ-dishonouring application is the pendant in verse 3. “And on account of this [infirmity] he ought, even as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.” This is bound up with the verses that precede,

and rigorously pertains to “every high priest” intended in them. All well-read men are aware that some scholars have dared to apply even this to Christ, following out logically the mistake that applies the passage to Him generally. They ought to have judged rather that, as it is a blasphemous falsehood that Christ offered for sins on His own account, the verses that precede describe high priesthood in general but not His, which has a higher ground in His deity and in His humanity Son of God as born of woman, and thus a more glorious character with power and efficacy intrinsic and eternal. The contrast here cannot be fairly denied. And it is the more striking because of the only point where resemblance is expressed immediately following. “And no one taketh the honour to himself but when called by God even as Aaron also.” The call of God was essential, and one might have thought indisputably clear in Aaron’s, and all the more after the gainsaying of Korah was answered in the destruction of himself and his rebellious companions. But the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and Christendom is apprised of that very woe in the solemn warning of Jude, no less prophetic than that of Enoch which he cites.

It is evident from the last verse under consideration that the priest is viewed according to God’s mind and statutes, not as the facts had long misrepresented this in fallen Israel. For notoriously intrigue, corruption, and violence had reigned for many a year in Jerusalem, and the civil power had taken the place of God as things at length grew irretrievably evil. If the priests did not take the honour to themselves, it was because the power of the sword forbade any save its own nominee. Hence the disorder that prevailed when the word of God came to

John, the forerunner of the Messiah, “Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests,” not only two but such a pair! Far different was the will of God even for the time of shadows.

From Scripture we know that the early uprising of Korah the Levite with others not even of that tribe disputed the priesthood of Aaron. This gainsaying, however, God settled publicly and solemnly by a destruction without parallel of the ringleaders, and by a plague that cut off thousands of the guilty people only stayed by the gracious and effectual intervention of Aaron at the bidding of Moses. Nor was this all. For Jehovah directed twelve rods to be laid up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, one for each house of their fathers, that He might cause that man’s rod to blossom whom He chose to draw near to Himself on behalf of all the others. On the morrow the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi alone budded, and blossomed, and yielded almonds: the figure of a better priesthood, of life out of death and fruit by the evident grace of God, of the One that ever liveth to make intercession. From Aaron the descent was fixed in his sons, not without striking dealings in good and evil that modified the succession according to the declared will of God. With Phinehas in the desert was the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; as it was manifest later when Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest and set Zadok in his stead, thus fulfilling the prophetic word about the intruding line of Eli. God alone was entitled to order it; and this He did, as He will by-and-by in the new age when all Israel shall be saved. Then the sons of Zadok reappear to minister to Jehovah, and stand in His

presence to offer unto Him the fat and the blood, saith the Lord Jehovah. Ezek. 44:15-31; Ezek. 48:8-14.

But of this future restoration when temple, priesthood, and sacrifice shall be in force, never more to be misused but rather to remind Israel under the new covenant of their accomplished blessing in the Messiah, we hear nothing in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The habitual aim is to bring out what the believer has now in Him Who died and is risen and exalted at God's right hand. There are hints here and there of the age and habitable earth to come, of the rest that remaineth for the people of God, of good things to come, of the day approaching, and the like. There are those intimations which look onward to another state and for blessing to the elect nation. But it would have undone the object of the Spirit to have expatiated on these earthly glories, though enough is said to prove that they are in no way effaced or forgotten, but await their fulfilment when Christ appears. Yet the evident and earnest and urgent task in hand is to bring out a "better thing" already verified in Christ on high, for those who believe while He is hidden in God and have the Holy Spirit to show us the efficacy of His sacrifice as seen in the light of glory, and the present application of His priesthood to the partakers of a heavenly calling, and the heavens themselves as the only true and adequate sanctuary, into which we are invited to draw near with all boldness in spirit. Hence the regeneration and its assured earthly privileges for Israel by-and-by stand in the background that the lustre of present heavenly associations may be undimmed, and that those who now believe in Christ while the nation rejects Him may see and enjoy their portion as incomparably deeper and higher.

Accordingly, whether for vindicating God's glory on the one hand or for the soul's complete blessedness on the other, we are waiting for no work. The mightiest for both is already done and accepted; as the person who has wrought all is the guarantee of its absolute and eternal excellency. And it is all the more precious and admirable, because He previously came down into the reality of a race and a scene ruined by sin, suffering for it yet perfectly free from it. This place He accepted loyally with an entire submissiveness and an unswerving obedience, whatever it might cost. Never was such a servant. Divine dignity, infinite love, unfailing devotedness, met in Him who took a bondman's place all through His life on earth, yea, in the end was made sin where none could follow.

"Thus the Christ also glorified not himself to be made high priest, but he that spake unto him, Thou art my Son: I today have begotten thee: even as he saith also in another [place], Thou [art] a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek" (verses 5, 6).

Truly He glorified not Himself in any respect, even when the atoning work was done. For His kingdom He waits, though Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is gone into the far country and on receiving it He will return. Meanwhile we have in Him a great High Priest, as we have seen. But in this too He "glorified not Himself to be made high priest." He waited on Him that sent Him, It was for God to speak, as He did. And here Psalm 2:7 is again cited. The dignity of His relationship is acknowledged. "Thou art my Son: I today have begotten Thee" (verse 5). Others were lifted out of their nothingness. God conferred as He would on such as were but men compassed with infirmity like Aaron.

Christ too deigned to be truly born of woman, but even so God owned Him His Son as none else. To partake of blood and flesh through and of His mother was in no way to forfeit His title. Son of God from everlasting to everlasting, in time also as man He has God declaring “I today have begotten thee.” His personal dignity, His relationship as Son of God, we hear repeated in connection with the office of priest. Such is the true ground in contrast with every other. Undoubtedly the Word was made flesh to be made high priest; and He has been already shown truly Son of man in this very connection (Heb. 2). Still there is the utmost care to reiterate the words of the second Psalm, though cited long before, that we may remember the more distinctly who He is that was made high priest in contradistinction with the highest human one of God’s own appointment.

Not till then have we the direct and explicit prediction from Psalm ex. “As he saith also in another [place], Thou [art] a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek” (verse 6). “For ever” is of course here qualified by the necessity and the existence of priesthood. In the eternal state, where sin and suffering are no more, it will cease in the final result of grace triumphant in glory.

Farther on we shall have before us the detailed application of this remarkable oath of Jehovah, the oath of which, it is added, He will not repent, the key to the scene historically introduced in Gen. 14. Suffice it here to say that the Spirit appears in this allusion to be simply drawing attention to the singular honour of the Christ, as in no way sharing in the order of Aaron but giving force to that of Melchizedek, who comes before us long before as sole priest, without successor,

predecessor, or subordinates. The order of Aaron was essentially successional, and for a reason that attaches to man as he is, subject to death because of sin. Melchizedek is strikingly brought before us as a living priest, alone in his blessing the faithful man on God's part, and in blessing God most high on man's part: the eloquent type which the Spirit so often uses of the Christ, as the sole and ever-living Priest on high.

We have had the first reference to the order of Melchizedek, which is repeated so often in the Epistle as to prove to any one who reverences Scripture its immense importance in the mind of God. It is a striking part of the typified glory of the Messiah, foreshown in Gen. 14, predicted and declared with divine solemnity in Psalm ex., applied and expounded with care and fulness in our Epistle, which can be examined as each reference comes before us. In the present chapter it is the peculiar and personal dignity which is insisted on in distinction from Aaron, however eminent by God's choice and appointment. But the Christ was God's Son, begotten too in time according to Psalm 2, as in John's Gospel Only-begotten before time and above dispensation, being eternal no less than the Father. Such was His person; and His office was no less singularly glorious even if typified by a royal priest of early days. For, as the psalm cited puts it, He is a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek. As Melchizedek stands alone, without predecessor or successor so far as the record speaks, the negative in his case becomes the positive in the case of Christ. And this the unimpeachably divine authority of the Psalm lays down with all simplicity and assurance. And such will be the exercise of His priesthood for the earth when the days of heaven shine

upon it in the future kingdom. Meanwhile, as our Epistle urges, He is priest after this order now as for ever. As He alone is Son, so He is exclusively royal priest without end, yet not glorifying Himself any more than Aaron, but a thousand years before so addressed by God, as the typical shadow met Abram not far from a thousand years before the Psalm.

Here we are first directed to His earthly path, then to His heavenly place, and the blessed results. “Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him out of death, and having been heard for his pious fear, though he were Son, learned obedience from the things which he suffered; and having been perfected, he became to all those that obey him author of everlasting salvation, addressed by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (verses 7-10). Suffering was to be distinctively His portion. It had no place in Aaron any more than in Melchizedek. In the Christ it was altogether pre-eminent and peculiar.

Glory intrinsic and conferred is His beyond comparison yet this is not all that grace gives in Him, nor yet all that we need, not merely as sinners but here especially as saints. Our sin and our misery but furnished the opportunity to divine love, and this is only shown and learnt in Christ, in Him that suffered infinitely here below — and Christ alone from the mystery of His person was capable of such suffering. Thus has He glorified, and thus reached hearts opened by grace to feel in our measure the wonders of His love. In the days of His flesh we behold the surface and hear the sound of His sorrows which God alone was able to fathom. For this as for other reasons essential to the purpose of God

and the blessing of man the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us, and obeyed unto death, yea, death of the cross. And if ever prayers and supplications, if ever strong crying and tears, were realities for the heart before God, His were. For His divine nature screened Him from no pain, grief, or humiliation, or suffering, but rather gave competency of person to endure perfectly, while all was accepted in absolute dependence on, and subjection to, His Father.

Not a particle of hardness or insensibility was in Christ. It was no small thing for His love to have hatred and contempt, to be despised and rejected of men; not only not to be honoured by the people of God and His people, but to be esteemed stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; to be deserted by all His disciples, denied by one, betrayed by another; and, far the most terrible of all and wholly different from all, to be forsaken of God just when He most needed His consolation and support. But so it must have been if sin was to be duly judged in His sacrifice, if our sins were to be completely borne away, and God to be glorified as to evil adequately and for ever. Gethsemane and the cross, or the first part of Psalm 22, are the best comment on verse 7. It was equally in keeping with God that He was not heard while atonement was in accomplishment, and that He was heard when He poured out His soul unto death, and Jehovah made it an offering for sin. For He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.

Christ therefore, besides that which fell exclusively on Him as the propitiation for our sins in vindicating God at all cost sacrificially, knew as no saint ever did all that

can befall holiness and love in a world and in the midst of a people alienated from God, yet claiming all the more that privilege as theirs only. As at the beginning Satan sought to attract Him from the path of lowly suffering and absolute obedience, by temptations subtly suited to the circumstances, so he assailed Him at the end with the terrors of death, and of such a death! But all was in vain. He suffered but did not succumb. Though prayer characterised Him at all times, then especially in His sorrow and deep depression He is alone with His Father (even His chosen three left behind about a stone's throw), and fallen on His face deprecates that cup, yet in meek submission; and this a second time (while others could not watch one hour with Him), and a third time from that agony in which He prayed more earnestly. And if an angel appeared to strengthen him, none the less did His sweat become as great drops of blood falling down on the ground. He endured the temptation and was blessed, suffering to the utmost. they slept for sorrow and, instead of praying entered into the temptation and fell. And He was saved not from dying but out of death. Whatever His inward and unwavering confidence, He could have no public answer till resurrection, when He was saved and out of death. To be saved from dying had left man in his sins, and Satan's power unbroken, and God's judgment in suspense, and His grace impotent. But the Son of man was there to deliver from all evil and to set all good on an immutable foundation to God's glory, even while saving the lost. He was heard for His pious fear,16 but after unsparing judgment had taken its course. Though Son of God, He learned 17 obedience from the things which He suffered. We learn to obey as God's children, who were once sons of disobedience; He being Son was used to

speak, and it was done; He knew not what obedience was. But when He became man, He took loyally this place: in the volume of the book it is written of Him, not of the first man, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.” Indeed He suffered it to the uttermost as well as did it in all perfection. His “having learned obedience” is only “difficult and much agitated,” because of weakness in holding fast His personal glory as true God, used only to command till He became man, and then “learned obedience” in all perfection as the perfect Servant, absolutely submissive to what He subsequently suffered.

This expression “perfected” means the completeness of His course through sufferings in resurrection and heavenly glory, as we may see far beyond controversy in Heb. 7:28, where the word has a form to express permanent result, instead of only indicating the fact accomplished as here. Neither “sanctified” nor “consecrated” is the true force: other words signify these correctly. Nor would either suit this place when His completed work of suffering is in view, by which alone salvation could be. And the result is here affirmed in terms of triumph: “He became to all those that obey Him author of everlasting salvation.” Thus on the one hand is His glorious position maintained, and on the other everlasting salvation is assured to all who own Him. He is none other than the prophet like unto Moses whom Jehovah promised long ago to raise up. But He is far more, and more blessed. For instead of only the threat of God’s retribution to him that hearkens not, He is become author of salvation to those that obey Him; yea, in contrast with legal uncertainty, “of everlasting salvation to those that obey Him.” How indeed could it be otherwise if we believe in the glory of His person and

the efficacy of His work? But all have not faith; and faith — obedience is the root of all other obedience precious in God's eyes, who disdains to accept the homage that is proffered to Himself while making light of His Son and of His infinite sufferings. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who sent Him." "Whoever denieth the Son hath not the Father either; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."

The rest of the chapter, and the following one, compose a long and instructive digression on the state of those addressed, the more to be blamed because they had had time to become mature. This it was forbade opening up the subject of Melchizedek, which otherwise might have been happy. It even exposed souls to the danger of going back from Christianity, though better things were expected of themselves, seeing that grace already had wrought practically in them. Hence on the one hand they are encouraged to be imitators of those that through faith and patience inherit the promises; and on the other God is shown to have given strong encouragement to the most tried and feeble by Jesus within the veil, the Forerunner gone in for us.

"Concerning whom [or, which] we have much to say and hard to be interpreted in saying, since ye are become dull of hearing. For whereas on account of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye again have need that some one teach you the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God, and have become in need of milk, [and] not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk [is] inexperienced in word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food belongeth to full-grown [persons], who on account of habit have their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil (verses 11-14).

There is no such hindrance to spiritual intelligence as traditional religion, and hence none exposed to it so much as Jewish believers. The wisdom of the world is another great impediment, which drew out the censure and warning of the apostle to the Corinthian saints, especially in 1 Cor. 2, 3, and in terms somewhat parallel. Both are hostile to that faith which is only nourished by the divine word, and is impaired by any human admixture. But of the two the religious rival is the more dangerous, because it has more seeming devotedness and humility, and so appeals, however groundlessly, to conscience instead of to mere mind. The effect is that growth in the Lord cannot but be arrested. Instead of becoming spiritual, souls abide fleshly and infantine. For the Holy Spirit is grieved, and reproves the state, instead of being free to lead on and strengthen by taking the things of Christ and showing them to such. We learn thereby how much the moral condition has to do with God’s training of the saint; and we may well thank Him that so it is. For nothing is more dangerous than advancing in knowledge where flesh and the world are unjudged: the devil at once seizes his opportunity to overthrow the unwary and careless, and seek His dishonour whose name they bear. But it is no remedy for the evil to be dwarfed by tradition or diverted by philosophy. The Holy Spirit has ample matter to convey; but if we are dulled and darkened by seeking to glean in other fields, the word of God becomes hard Of interpretation to us. Hence it is added “Since ye are become” (not simply “are” as in the A.V.) “dull in your hearing” (the dative of reference, and naturally thence in the plural).

Our Lord had touched on the same difficulty and danger for His Israelitish hearers in the first Gospel. From every hearer of the word of the kingdom, if he understand it not, the wicked one comes and catches away what had been sown in his heart; as on the other hand the seed sown on the good ground is he that hears and understands the word (Matt. 13:19, 23). In Mark, as with a view to service, it is a question of reception or not; in Luke, as looking on to strangers of the Gentiles, the point is “believing” and being “saved,” keeping the word and bringing forth fruit with patience. But the Jew, as being in continual contact with religious prejudice and tradition, was in peculiar danger of not “understanding” what was new and of God, the present test of faith.

The apostle now expostulates because of their backwardness in the truth (after professing it so long). “For whereas ye ought on account of the time to be teachers, ye again have need that some one teach you the elements,” etc. Christendom lies open to the self-same rebuke, and from similar causes. Rom. 11 had pointed out a danger peculiar to it, and tending to as great if not greater self-complacency, the danger of conceiving itself secure for ever, and so perverting the obvious admonition from the excision of the Jew into the proud assurance of immunity for the Gentile craft. It is indeed the very snare into which the Romish system has fallen beyond all others — and is it not striking that the Spirit gave this warning there in particular? Here it is only the stop put to their learning the things of God that is noticed. Instead of being teachers now, after so long bearing the Lord’s name, they had need again to be taught the very rudiments. So in similar conditions it

ever is. No man ever became mighty in God's word by the study of theology, though some theologians have in a measure grown in spite of what is calculated to obstruct and blind. It is the general effect which proves the character of what works for profit or loss. Now who can doubt the lamentable ignorance of God's word in Christendom at large? And is it not certain that the darkness is greatest where men are most shut up to tradition and least search the Scriptures?

No doubt when souls are in this state, they need a powerful means to set them free; and this Epistle is a fine sample of the truth grace employs to that end. The person of Christ has to be clearly presented, and their distinct and blessed association with Him through His atoning work, as well as His position and gracious functions for them on high. This alone dispels all earth-born clouds, and extricates from the din and dust of human schools. Therefore was the apostle ministering these fundamental truths throughout in order to their deliverance. He implies, nay affirms, that they were spiritually infants needing to learn the elements over again. These, qualified as "of the beginning of the oracles of God," mean what God gave in Christ here below, short of His redemption and His heavenly place, with the gift of the Spirit, which lend Christianity its true distinctive character and its power. The eyes of the disciples were blessed because they saw, and their ears because they heard, what many prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear but did not. The accomplishment of redemption and the new place of Christ in heaven went far beyond. Here they were utterly dull, not so much about the facts as respecting their blessed import and results to faith, as well as for

God’s glory. The issue was that the very rudiments were rendered obscure and uncertain: so little can the Christian afford to waste his time in seeking the living One among the dead, and so injurious is the issue of turning from the actual testimony of God on our relationships to a vague and dreamy sentiment about the past. Not one thing is understood aright. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” It is never so, if we look not to Christ where God is now pointing us. In His light we see light. Failure here exposes the Christian now as then to become a person Having need of milk and not of solid food — of fare for babes rather than for adults: a state quite anomalous since redemption.

This figure is unfolded in the next two verses. In no way is milk slighted in its due place. It is the most wholesome and suited of all nourishment for the infant; but the grown man requires quite different food for his developed state and appropriate duties. “For every one that partaketh of milk [is] unskilled (or, without experience) in the word of righteousness, for he is an infant; but solid food belongeth to full-grown persons that have by reason of habit their senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil.” By “partaking” is meant having milk for one’s share in ordinary use, as a babe takes it not for partial or occasional fare, as any one might. The word translated “full-grown” is literally “perfect,” and given in the A.V. so repeatedly that some lose the true force, which is simply those come to maturity.

Now this is the present aim of the gospel, and its effect wherever souls submit to God’s righteousness in Christ. We may see the same truth in substance set forth in Gal.

3, 4. Faith having come (i.e. dispensationally), we are no longer under a child-guide, as the law had been unto Christ; “for ye are all,” says the apostle to the Galatian saints, “God’s sons by faith in Christ Jesus.” “Now I say that the heir, as long as he is an infant, differeth nothing from a slave, though he be lord of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. So we too, when we were infants, were enslaved under the elements of the world. But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son, come of woman, come under law, that he might redeem those under the law, that we might receive our sonship. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

We may gather therefore that to stop short of liberty and sonship is to abide in the bondage of law, and to undo the privileges of the gospel. Further, we may note how indigenous to the heart is this fear of God’s grace, which, even when the gospel is sounding freedom to the slave through faith in Christ, is ever prone to go back to what is annulled (2 Cor. 3); and this among Gentiles as well as Jews: a retrograde tendency which the apostle was combating always and everywhere. Whatever its source, whether worldly wisdom or legalism, it is an evil to which no quarter should be shown, more particularly as we have rarely to do with it now in Jews, for whom old and fond habits might be pleaded. But for the ordinary Christian, what extenuation can be offered? The risen and ascended Christ supposes the work accepted of God whereby peace was made; and every believer is justified from all things from which none could be justified by the law of Moses.

The Hebrews addressed had not gone on with the gospel. They were as infants needing milk, and unable to digest solid food. It was not God's will, but their prejudices and unbelief which thwarted their growth. The believer if simple passes, we may say, at once into sonship; if occupied with self, with his ordinances, with his church, or with any object to engage his soul other than Christ, he remains an infant like those Hebrews, and in no real sense full-grown any more than they. God is not mocked, nor does He suffer even saints to slight or doubt the gospel with impunity. It is to prefer bondage when grace is proclaiming liberty; and to need milk instead of that solid food which suits the full-grown; yet every Christian ought to be full-grown. Christ redeemed him, even if a Hebrew of Hebrews or a Pharisee of Pharisees, to know the sonship of God in the power of His Spirit.

15 Calvin in his Commentary argues on Christ bearing our infirmities, though free from sin and undefiled. The reference is of course to Matthew's application (Matt 8:17) of Isa. 53:4. But it is erroneous. The manning is, not that He took our infirmities and bare our sickness as in His person, jut that thus He acted in healing diseases and expelling demons. It was not mere power; but He felt before God in grace the weight of all the evil that He removed.

16 Not only Calvin and Beza of the Reformed, but the old Latin versions, followed by Ambrose, and by moderns, especially Lutherans, strangely render this "delivered from fear," or the like.

17 Dr. Whitby fell into the perversion of rendering the verb "taught"!

Hebrews 6

It is of the highest importance then that the believer should wake up to his due place according to the call of grace. Christ as He now is makes His relationship evident. By Him and to Him where He sits at God's right hand we are called. It is therefore in the fullest sense a heavenly calling. Old things not evil things only, are passed away. We are by faith associated with the glorified Christ who, having accomplished redemption, is on that ground gone into heaven, so as to confer on the faithful a heavenly relationship. All that is distinctive of the Christian accordingly is in contrast with the ancient people of God, whose position, associations, worship, and hope were earthly, though ordered of God. The danger of the Christian therefore, and especially for the Hebrew Christian, was a lapse into earthly things which was the more easily done as the O.T. was no less divinely inspired than the New, and hence might plausibly be pleaded to justify such a return.

"Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ, let us press on unto full growth [lit. perfection], not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in God, of teaching of washings and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of dead [persons], and of everlasting judgment; and this will we do if God permit" (verses 1-3).

We could not be exhorted in any just sense to leave "the principles" of the doctrine of Christ. For first principles never become antiquated. Nor does the text really say so here, any more than it does in truth speak slightingly of, "the first principles of the oracles of God" in Heb. 5:12.

“Principles” or “first principles” of Christianity it is of all moment to apprehend and hold fast; and in fact the Epistle insists on this from first to last. It was here the Hebrew confessors of Christ were weak. They had faintly if at all realised the truth that was wrapped up in the person of Christ and in the facts on which the gospel is based. They were occupied with whatever lay short of His death, resurrection, and ascension, with a Messiah known after the flesh. But these were such “rudiments” as were in keeping with Him on earth, when the Holy Spirit was not yet given and the words the Lord spoke were dimly understood. Indeed many things He had yet to say which they could not then bear. This was but “the beginning of the oracles of God”; whereas the principles of the doctrine of Christ would better express that profound connection of truth with fundamental facts and Christ’s person which characterises the Epistles of Paul and John. What is really meant here is “the word of the beginning of Christ,” that which was revealed in the days of His flesh and in due time recorded as His ministry in the Gospels. To limit the soul to this, perfect as it was in its season and in itself, is to do without that blessed use of His redemption and heavenly headship which the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to preach and teach, and which we have permanently in the apostolic writings. His cross totally changed the standing of the believer. To ignore this is in fact to stop short of full and proper Christianity, to remain infants, where the Lord would have His own to reach their majority. Let us not slight the riches of His grace.

“Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ, let us press on unto full growth.” The new status of the Christian depends on Christ dead, risen, and in

heaven. The infinite sacrifice is already offered and accepted; and only so has Christ taken His seat on the right hand of the Majesty on high. We cannot therefore go to elements before the cross for that which forms and fashions the Christian. We, if full-grown, need the corn of the land, now that it is no longer a question of raining manna in the wilderness.

The various English versions are disappointing. Wiclif seems to have read or mistaken “immittentes” for “intermittentes” in the Vulgate, for he has the strange error of “bringing in,” etc., instead of leaving off. And Tyndale is loose indeed: let us leave the doctryne pertayninge to the beginninge of a Christen man.” In result it is not far from the general sense, though intolerable as a translation. Cranmer’s Bible and the Genevese followed Tyndale less or more closely. The Rhemish, save in its servile adherence to the Latin, is more exact than any; for even the A. and the R.Vv., as we have seen, might mislead in the text, though precise in the margin. The Revisers rightly gave “full grown” for perfect in Heb. 5:14; consistency would therefore demand “full growth” here. For it is not the quite ignorant who fail to understand that “Perfection” means only this, the adult standing of the Christian as compared with infancy before redemption. But the enemy has a hand in keeping believers back now, while this Epistle chides the Hebrews for the same culpable dulness in early days.

The statement in the chapter before, that Christ having been made perfect became, to all those that obey Him, Author of eternal salvation, helps much to see what perfection or full growth means here. Till then the saints could not rise above promise. Now whatever, or how

many soever, be the promises of God, in Him is the Yea, and in Him the Amen for glory to God by us. Till redemption the Spirit of prophecy could say that God's salvation was near to come, and His righteousness to be revealed. But the gospel declares that His righteousness has been manifested, and that the believer has eternal life and receives the end of His faith, even soul-salvation, though we have to wait for that of the body yet. Meanwhile those that are Christ's are cleansed once for all, not only sanctified through the offering of Christ, but perfected in perpetuity (εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς), as Heb. 10 tells us unhesitatingly. The Holy Ghost, instead of keeping our guilt continually before us, testifies that through Christ's work God will remember our sins and iniquities no more. Thus for the Christian, with full remission, there is no more offering for sins; and hence he has boldness to enter the holies by the blood of Jesus. Those that by faith seize this, the truth of the gospel, are no more under age, held in bondage (as the apostle says elsewhere) under the rudiments of the world. By the faith of Him who died and rose we receive the adoption of sons, and through His Spirit cry, Abba, Father. So we draw nigh.

It was here the Hebrews were slow to hear and learn of God. They did not doubt that Jesus was the Christ; but they were dull to own both the full glory of His person and the present eternal efficacy of His work. This failure in faith kept them babes, and for this they are blamed; for God could not reveal more distinctly the dignity of Christ, nor could Father, Son, and Holy Ghost add to the fulness of what His cross is to God as well as to the believer. The Holy Spirit is come down from the glory of heaven to attest what Christ is there, and what His work

has done for all those that believe in Him. Entrance by faith into this portion is full growth.

It was really going back from heavenly glory and eternal redemption on the part of all who refused to go forward into the full privileges of the gospel, content to know no more than what the disciples had before the cross. All they had then did not give them peace with God, for it did not cleanse their consciences. The middle wall of partition stood unbroken. There was no access for them into the holies, nor had they the Spirit of adoption. Neither the sting of death was gone, nor the power of sin annulled. Full growth implies, on the contrary, all this blessedness, and more; and to this the Hebrews are here exhorted to go on. It is not attainment, but simple faith in the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, in a word Christianity. Alas! how many who call themselves Christians, as sincere believers as the Hebrews addressed, are no less than they looking behind, instead of moving on to the enjoyment by faith of the risen Saviour, and of their nearness to His God and Father!

The next words give a sample of the things that occupied those who were not full grown, from which they are here dissuaded: “not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith in God.” It was all well to have laid such a foundation once; it was childish to be ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Repentance is indispensable for a sinful man; faith in God must ever be in a saint. But eternal life is now bestowed, Christ sent as propitiation, and the Holy Ghost given to us. Is all this to leave believers where they were? Take again yet lower things, “of doctrine of washings and imposition of hands.” These had their place, as we know, and many heed them much

now as then, external though they are and in no way perfecting the worshipper as touching the conscience. The “washings” may include John’s baptism, or that of the disciples, though the word slightly differs in its form; and the laying on of hands was certainly an ancient sign of blessing, which we see practised in various ways even after the gospel. But those whose hearts dwell in such signs and set not their mind on things above betray the symptoms of their infantine condition. God has provided some better thing for us. They are among the things whatever their teaching might be, which the light of the glory now revealed in Christ leaves in the shade. So again with the still weightier doctrine “of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment.” No Christian denies either for a moment, but acknowledges both truths; yet he looks for his blessing at Christ’s coming, as he knows from His own lips that judgment awaits only those who reject Him, and that believers are to rise in the contrasted resurrection of life and do not come into judgment.

Let souls beware then of labour in vain that diverts from better blessing, “And this we will do, if God permit.” For yet another and urgent danger is set before the Hebrew Christians, not a little connected with obstinate clinging to old things however infantine, or a yet more ensnaring return of affection for them after being apparently weaned.

God had put honour upon the Son of man, not only here below (Acts 2:23. 10:38), but yet more when redemption had vindicated Him, and overthrown Satan, and made not only righteousness but heavenly glory available for man in sovereign grace. The consequence was an outburst of divine light and a display of power of the

Spirit in man, such as had never been, and such as could never be otherwise. The time for the public deliverance of the world is not yet come, though Jesus the Lord of lords and King of kings sits at God's right hand. In fact another and still more intimately. blessed work is in hand, the call of the heavenly saints, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, His body and even to be His bride, though the marriage be not yet come. These He is gathering by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Meanwhile the Spirit could not but bear witness of the victory over evil and death and Satan already achieved by the risen and ascended Christ Hence the power that wrought at Pentecost and afterward according to the promise of the Lord, a promise amply fulfilled.

For His was title, not only to give eternal life to as many as the Father gave Him, but over all flesh. And the Lord manifested power not only in the apostles, but in multitudes of others. It was never guaranteed to be all the days till the end with His servants, as His presence was. If we in these days cannot speak of it, let us have grace at least to feel and own why this is, and how little His saints know deliverance from that which dishonours Him and makes it morally questionable whether such a display could be now without compromising the truth. For how consistently could there be such a divine energy shed on all Christians after being gathered in one when scattered again to the shame of His name? How could one company be singled out to have such an honour conferred without the most imminent danger of self-satisfaction or of despite done to others? That grace works by God's word and Spirit, wherever Christ is preached, is a proof of His faithful goodness and unfailing purpose; as also that faith may and ought to

see His will for His own to walk together according to His immutable word and with becoming lowliness, so as to please Him, is ever true and binding. But it must be owned that the church is stripped of her ornaments, and justly.

Now this system of power and privilege had naturally great attraction in early days for the Hebrew saints, as for others, notably the Corinthians, as we may gather from the First Epistle. And those not born of God, who therefore could not appreciate aright either their own evil and ruin or the immense grace of God in Christ and His work, would naturally dwell much on that which so distinguished the Christian confession. Hence the Holy Spirit leads to a setting forth of a real and fatal peril for all who idolised visible power and slighted the far deeper wonders of unseen things. All other displays, though subserving the glory of the Lord, were altogether subordinate to the grace of God in which He tasted death, annulled Satan's power, made propitiation, and thus laid a righteous and everlasting basis for all blessing to God's glory, but to each purpose in God's time, yet for ever.

"For those that were once enlightened, and tasted the heavenly gift, and became partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted God's good word and powers of [an] age to come, and fell away, [it is] impossible to renew again unto repentance, crucifying for themselves as they do and putting to shame the Son of God. For land that drank the rain that often cometh upon it, and bringeth forth herbage meet for those for whose sake it is also tilled, partaketh of blessing from God; but Yielding thorns and thistles [it is] worthless and near a curse, the end of which [is] to be burned" (verses 4-8).

It is observable that we read here of enlightenment, not of new birth or eternal life. Undoubtedly the heavenly gift comes before us; and so it is not earthly like the associations of the Messiah, but “heavenly” because of contrast with Canaan hopes. How great a boon that God is now revealing heavenly grace! Further, it is not the old and essential truth of the Holy Spirit quickening a soul by the word, still less of now sealing the believer and for ever dwelling in him. We must not forget that He was sent down also to constitute the assembly God’s habitation; so that all introduced therein were in a general way partakers of the Spirit. Whoever bowed to the gospel tasted God’s word as good, and received it with joy as of far different savour from that law which was a ministration of death and condemnation. Then the powers exercised in casting out demons, healing, and the like, were samples of the age to come when they will be fully displayed, under the reign of the Son of man.

Now the substance of Christian privileges remains, and must as long as the church lives on earth and the gospel of Christ’s glory is preached. There is real light of God shining on souls, not the dark or the dimness which could not but be before the gospel. It is still a heavenly calling, not an earthly one. Again, it is not of God to put forward His law when His Spirit is here still more fully to demonstrate sin, righteousness, and judgment to the world. And His word showing (not law nor promise only, but) accomplishment in Christ is surely “good”; as it is for all the baptised at least to taste that it is good, even if there be no longer the powers of the coming age, as we see them notably absent from the seven churches of the Revelation. But to give up all this, after having once profited by its wondrous excellence in the name of the

glorified Jesus, is fatal. For what more can grace do or give to act on souls? If the Jews rejected the Messiah on earth, the Holy Spirit could and did meet them with a call to repentance and remission in His name exalted by and at God's right hand. But after having confessed Him on high and shared these privileges and powers, as members of the heavenly firm (which the baptised are, in privilege and responsibility), to fall away is to forfeit all. Yea too, there is no more resource in the treasures of grace. God has no fresh and higher way of presenting Christ to act on such for recovery. Therefore is it added for those that "fell away" that it is "impossible to renew such again unto repentance, crucifying for themselves as they do and putting to shame the Son of God." There had been Christ here in humiliation; there is Christ in glory above: what more, deeper, higher, has God to win the heart by?

There is no such hope now as a Messiah after the flesh. Him the Jewish people definitely cast out. If any had known Him so, henceforth He was thus known no more. He is the Christ dead, risen, and glorified in heaven. This is the Christian faith. To this the believer must go on, to Christ not on earth but on high with its blessed consequences. To lay hold of Him thus is "perfection" or full growth.

Carefully notice how the scripture before us guards us from confounding light and power with life. Not a word implies that those that fell away were ever quickened in the Christ, or sealed with the Spirit, or baptised in His energy into the one body. It is simply the case of disciples walking no more with Christ, stumbling at the truth or its consequences. So it was when He was here; so it followed when He sat on high with aggravation of

guilt, as is here shown, for those that since fell away. Light shone, goodness was tasted, evidence abundant and undeniable; yet they fell away, through (not ignorance but) selfwill which could not bear God's will. They undoubtedly and fatally shrank from the tribulation through which we must enter the kingdom.

The illustration that follows confirms this fully. It was bad land, fruitful only in thorns and thistles, instead of a good return for the rain drunk in from above. Only grace in an evil world makes the heart good soil to bring forth herbs or fruit meet for those for whose sake also it is tilled. The Spirit uses the word to deal with the ungodly, ploughs up the soul, as well as sows the incorruptible seed of the word of God which lives and abides. This is a wholly different thing from seeing the beauty and reasonableness of "the plan of salvation," and still more the unanswerable proofs from evidence: from both people may and do fall away on pressure.

So it is now in Christendom. What is it generally but land18 that has drunk the rain that comes oft upon it, but, instead of bringing forth meet herbs, bears thorns and thistles? By God's word it is therefore rejected and nigh unto a curse (Luke 17:28-37; Rom. 11:21, 22; 1 Cor. 10:1-15; 2 Thess. 2; 2 Tim. 3, 4; Rev. 17). Is not its end to be burned? See 2 Thess. 1:7-10. The power displayed has long vanished to zero; but the awful fact is that the classes and the masses are alike departing from the truth of the gospel into a superstitious aping of effete and condemned Judaism, or into a still more audacious return to heathenism in the form of its unbelieving philosophy. And the retrogression both ways in our day is amazingly rapid and unblushing But the apostle did not so think of those who stand, be it ever so feebly,

while others go away. Continuance in good is of God, who had not left His own without other tokens of life. For the trees are not dead which bear a little fruit. And to this we are directed in the encouraging, words that follow.

“But, beloved, we are persuaded of you things better and akin to salvation, if even we thus speak. For God [is] not unrighteous to forget our work and the love19 which ye showed to his name, in that ye ministered to the saints and do minister. And we earnestly desire that each of you may show the same diligence in regard to the full assurance of hope till the end; that ye become not sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and long-suffering inherit the promises” (verses 9-12).

That we renounce all other dependence save Christ as our lord and Saviour is the faith that saves the soul, the one unchanging resting-place for every one conscious of his sins and of the evil of the nature that bore them, as ready as ever to break out unless we be kept by God’s grace in the secret that we died to sin with Christ, and hence are free to live unto righteousness. Others cannot see this, but they may and ought to see in the Christian the fruits of the Spirit; as here the apostle, after so solemnly admonishing, could cheer the saints by the “better things” he was persuaded concerning them.

“Next” is a frequent sense of the term (

ἐχ.) employed. Here it is modified by the context, as often in ordinary Greek, and means not “following,” but “pertaining to” or “connected with” salvation. God is love, and “love” is of God, who has pleasure in reality of “work” rather than in the ideas which begin and end with man; and what is he to be accounted of? Cease ye

from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. He who alone avails is near to all that call upon Him. But if faith is the inlet of all that is divine, it works by love, and thus affords testimony to others. Nor is it only those that believe and love who hail every good fruit, but God is not unjust to forget what His grace produces in “your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered and do minister to his saints.” So will our Lord when He sits on His throne as Son of man say to the Gentiles that are on His right hand, “Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it to me.”

But it is false and foolish to say that love can be without faith. Yet the acceptable work is what is shown toward His name, and very especially in service to His saints. One may have all faith as a gift, so as to remove mountains; but without love one is nothing. Yea, if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if in courage and zeal I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me to nothing Christ is the true touchstone. “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.” Then “whosoever loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him as on the other hand “hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments.” This may not be Aristotelian logic; nor is it science; but it is the sole true and divine charity. And as it had been known in these Hebrew saints, so the apostle sees it going on. For the love which is of God is not blind but discerns clearly, as the eye is single.

Yet was there a lack which he longs to see filled up. “And we earnestly desire that each of you may show the same

diligence as regards the full assurance of hope till the end." He was far from slighting hope any more than faith, because love is the greatest, abiding in fullest exercise when faith and hope vanish in the brightness of heavenly and everlasting fruition. For we are yet here below, though free of the sanctuary by faith, and entitled to regard heaven as our proper fatherland; as Christ is there our life, and the Holy Spirit is here to give us present enjoyment, the earnest of the inheritance. Therefore do we need to be kept from the present things that are seen, by our eyes fixing on the glory that is eternal and unseen (2 Cor. 4). And we reckon wrong if we do not reckon with the apostle, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward. Hope that is seen is not hope — for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, with patience we wait.

It was here also that a failure was discerned, though pointed out with the delicacy of love, that they might show the same diligence as in what he delighted to own. So he here longs for the like "as to the full assurance of hope till the end." So only does hope exercise its power. Earthly hopes indulged are as destructive to the divine hope God gives, as other objects trusted are wholly inconsistent with living faith. Nothing less than the full assurance of hope could satisfy the apostle's heart for the saints; as he adds, "that ye become not sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and long-suffering inherit the promises." We need all whereby the Holy Spirit acts on our souls; and in this, as He employs the written word of God, so He is ever glorifying Christ and endearing Him to our hearts. We cannot afford to let our

souls turn aside from what is revealed, nor even to make such a favourite of a part of what is revealed as to slight the rest. And assuredly the glory Christ gives is bright enough to call for full assurance of hope and to keep the blessed end in full view. Otherwise we become sluggish or dull where we ought to be earnest and keenly awake, “imitators” of the saints of old, “of those who through faith and long-suffering inherit the promises.” The present here, as often elsewhere, is not the mere historical force, but the ethical or abstract. The inheritors of the promises have their faith put to the proof and their longsuffering in habitual exercise. “Blessed is he that endureth temptation; for, when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which he hath promised to them that love him.”

The desire that the saints should imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises at once recalls the father of the faithful in a way intended to strengthen their confidence.

“For God having made promise to Abraham, since he could swear by none greater, swore by himself saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee; and thus having patiently endured he obtained the promise. For men swear by the greater, and to them the oath [is] an end of all dispute for confirmation: wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his counsel, intervened by an oath that through two unchanceable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have strong encouragement, who fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before [us], which we have as anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast and entering into the [part]

within the veil; where as forerunner for us entered Jesus, become for ever high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" (verses 13-20).

When faith grows dim, earthly things take the place of the heavenly objects that once filled the heart. The danger for these believing Jews remains for others, and indeed is urgent in the actual state of Christendom. A religion of antiquity has great attraction for some; so has social position for others. Both are of the earth, and irreconcilable with Him who was crucified by priests and governors (the highest that the world then knew), but is now crowned with glory in heaven. The faith of Him thus presented (and it is the essence of the gospel) is intended to form the heart and life of all that bear His name. When the truth shines brightly within according to the word, the Holy Spirit makes it energetic; and the world is judged alike in its religious pretensions and in its external case and honours. Doubtless there is far more revealed by and in the Saviour than the patriarchs ever knew. Yet substantially the sight of Abraham a pilgrim, as Scripture points out, was an appeal of no small power to act on the soul of a believing Jew, in danger of retrograding to that which was once his boast through losing sight of Christ in heavenly glory and the hope of sharing all with Him. Abraham possessed nothing in Canaan, having to buy even a grave; he hung on the promise of God. The Christian Jews were so far in a similar position; they were waiting to inherit the promises. Abraham and his son and his son's son (the most honoured of the fathers in general estimation, and surely ancient enough to satisfy the most ardent of those who affected antiquity), all died in faith, not in possession. They saw and greeted the promises from

afar and confessed themselves strangers on the earth. Why should Christians repine when called to a like path? It is unbelief that despises the hope and craves some present enjoyment of an earthly sort.

Now God had even then given good ground of assurance to Abraham, who led the way. He had added His oath to His promise: a blessed confirmation for the tried, even though they were far from being gainsayers. Only theorists would think lightly of such a gracious provision only those who dream of pilgrimage in a palace and have no purpose of heart to live out the truth. When conscience is in earnest, our own weakness is felt, and the way of Christ seems difficult, dangerous, and repulsive. Hence the gracious wisdom of God gave His oath in addition to His promise, as we may read in Gen. 22:17, 18: a precious cheer to him who at that very time received back his son as from the dead in a parable.

Nor was it for Abraham's sake only or those who immediately succeeded that God gave this twofold solemn guarantee. He was minded thus to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His counsel. Therefore did He mediate or interpose with an oath to lift up the eyes of all who believe from present and seen things to that hope which rests on His word confirmed by His oath. What. loving condescension to those who march through an enemy's land! Such are clearly the "two unchangeable things in which it was impossible for God to lie"; the application of which is made, not to the fathers of old, but to the children now, "that we might have strong encouragement, that fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."

Thus the chapter opens with a most serious warning. On the one hand the brightest light, the highest testimony, the participation of the Holy Spirit, the sweetness of the gospel, the powers of the age to come in token of Christ's triumph, are the chief external privileges of Christianity. Yet men might have them all, and utterly fall away so as to have no renewal to repentance possible. They are not life, eternal life in Christ; they include not the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that was given to us. Neither illumination nor power is the same as being born again, which is not said or supposed here. On the other hand, when the good cheer of divine grace follows, these closing verses point out the lowest faith ever described in gospel days, "those who fled for refuge" (an allusion to the beautiful figure of the man-slayer only just saved from his pursuers) enabled "to lay hold of the hope set before us": a truly "strong encouragement" for the weak and trembling faithful.

Nor is this all. The hope set now before the believer far transcends all that could be for the saints in O.T. times. We have it as "anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast and entering into that which is within the veil, where as forerunner for us entered Jesus, become for ever high priest according to the order of Melchizedek." Here the security is enhanced and crowned by One who is God no less than man, Jehovah-Messiah the Saviour, who is gone back to heaven for us, after having made the purification of sins and found an eternal redemption.

In Him and His work all is made sure. The rights of God are conciliated with His grace. Sin has been judged so as to vindicate the nicest regard for injured majesty and holiness. Mercy can flow freely yet on a basis of

righteousness, no longer sought in vain from flesh and guilty man, but established by God as due to Christ (John 12) and ministered by the Spirit in the gospel (2 Cor. 3). He Who is exalted in heaven is the promised Messiah, the object, securer, and dispenser of all the promises of God. Thus will the earth be best blessed in due time: but meanwhile those who believe in Him before He appears are associated with Him in a heavenly relationship even while they are here, that they too on clearer and fairer ground than Moses could occupy may account the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. He as forerunner for us has entered within the veil — heaven itself: which none could know or claim till He had come here, suffered for sins, and been received up in glory. If this does not win the believer from an earthly mind, from a sanctuary of the world, nothing else can. He who has loved us, our forerunner in heaven, though rejected of men, draws and binds our hearts to Himself where He is; and God reveals Him to us there for this express end.

18 It is not “the earth” as a whole as in A. V., nor yet as in R. V. “the land,” etc., as that particular one objectively viewed, but characteristically “land”; for here English idiom as often coincides with Greek.

19 The Text. Rec. adds “labour of,” probably from 1 Thess. 1:3. The best authorities (A B D S P 6, 17, 31, 37, 47, etc., and almost all ancient Vv.) are adverse.

Hebrews 7

The portion on which we enter develops the type of Melchizedek as far as it applies to Christ in heaven and the Christian portion. The future earthly part is but hinted at and in no way opened out.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the20 most high God, that21 met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham assigned a tenth Of all, first being interpreted king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but likened to the Son of God, abideth a priest continuously” (verses 1-3).

Here the Spirit of God gives us a fine sample of unfolding an incident of the O.T. in the light of the New. The glory of Christ as ever is the true key, without which the mind of God in His word is never apprehended. And it is striking to see that the reticence of Scripture is only less instructive than its disclosures. All has to be weighed; but who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of God, who now works in us that believe by the same Spirit who inspired both Testaments, and works to glorify (not the Christian nor the church, blessed as both are, but) Christ, Whose grace and glory are the substance of our best blessings.

In Gen. 14 we have the last notice of the public life of Abraham as chosen and called out to walk in faith of God’s promise; for Gen. 15 begins the dealings of God with him personally. The occasion was the rescue of Lot carried away, family and goods, with the rest of his

neighbours whose worldly advantages he had coveted. The man of simple faith and self-sacrifice, of whom Lot had taken advantage (Gen. 13), unhesitatingly pursues and vanquishes the victorious kings of the east. Thereon appears Melchizedek, the more unexpectedly as there seems scarcely any ground to doubt that he was a prince akin to the guilty race that soon after were punished by the most solemn judgment of God. Yet was he not an idolater but priest of the most high God. “And Melchizedek, king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all” (verses 18-20).

The all-important truth to grasp is that the Epistle reasons solely on “the order.” of Melchizedek in contrast with that of Aaron. When it speaks of the exercise of priesthood, Aaron is the type and not Melchizedek; and then we hear of sacrifice and intercession, of blood-shedding and a sanctuary, with the Levitical ritual in general. Self-evidently all this has no relation to Melchizedek, only to Aaron as typifying the Lord’s present action above grounded on His atoning work for sin.

The exercise of the royal priesthood looks on to the earth in a future day, when the Man whose name is the Branch shall build the temple in truth (Zech. 6:13). Even He shall build the temple of Jehovah, and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and a counsel of peace shall be between Them both. Of that day Hosea 2:14-23

is a bright witness: only here it is according to His title of Jehovah. “And it shall be in that day, saith Jehovah, thou shalt call me my Husband, and thou shalt call me no more Baali [my Master]. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth [He will be in fact and affection El-Elyon, the Most High God], and they shall no more be remembered by their name. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and With the birds of the heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground; and I will break bow and sword and battle out of the land, and will make them to lie down safely. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know Jehovah. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear the hleavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and the new wine and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow her unto me in the land, and I will have mercy upon Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-Ammi, My people thou., and they shall say, My God.”

This will be the kingdom of God, not in the moral sense which applies now and always, of which our Lord (Matt. 6:33) and the apostle Paul (Rom. 14:17) speak, but in the future display when adversaries are put down. Our Epistle alludes to it as the habitable earth or world to come (Heb. 2), and as the age to come (Heb. 6), as indeed in other forms most expressive. It is the great goal of prophecy whether in the O.T. or in the N.T. Great must be the cap for his soul who does not look onward to triumph for mercy and truth, for righteousness and glory, not in heaven only but on this earth, placed under

our Lord Jesus, when Israel shall be by grace repentant and subject, and thus fitted to fill their allotted place in that day as God's people, His son, His firstborn (Ex. 4:22); and the Gentiles, humbled by divine judgments as well as by unmerited and inexhaustible goodness, shall know that Jehovah sanctifies Israel with His sanctuary in their midst for ever. The glory of the Lord manifested here below will be the answer to His sufferings and shame; and those who in faith and love have shared the latter shall enjoy the former, reigning with Him over the earth. This is not the eternal state, but the kingdom for a thousand years before eternity begins or that judgment of the dead, the wicked dead, which precedes it.

Nor has anyone an adequate conception of the coming Kingdom of God, who does not look for it administered by the risen Lord in person, the glorified saints being on high, Israel and the, nations here below. For there are earthly things as well as heavenly. Of this the Lord reminded Nicodemus, teacher of Israel though he was (John 3:3, 5, 12); and many more in Christendom need to be reminded of it now. For men are ever apt to be occupied with their own things, and easily confound this purpose of God for Christ's glory with a vague and general view of eternity. But doctrinal scripture is as distinct and indisputable as the prophetic word. "For the earnest expectation of the creation" (expressly distinguished from ourselves also having the firstfruits of the Spirit) "waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God"; which without doubt is when we follow Christ out of heaven and are manifested with Him in glory (Rom. 8:18-25; Col. 3:4; Rev. 17:14, Rev. 19:14). This indeed is the regeneration (Matt. 19:28), that age, and the resurrection from the dead (Luke 20:35) when the

Father's kingdom is come from above, and His will is done on earth as in heaven. Yet it is not the end when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, but His reigning till He put all the enemies under His feet. And it is plain that death as last enemy is not annulled till just before the great white throne. For the millennium, however blessed beyond example, is not absolutely perfect like the eternity which it ushers in. See Isa. 65, 1 Cor. 15, and 2 Peter 3.

One of the most distinctive marks of that day, a dispensation of the fulness of the seasons, is God's heading or summing up all in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. No doubt as we are children of God, so are we His heirs and joint-heirs with Christ, the Heir of all things. Hence we are here said (Eph. 1:10, 11) to have obtained inheritance, which will be manifested in that day; for the glory that the Father has given Him He has given us, though we have to wait, in a hope that does not make ashamed (John 17; Rom. 5:5). He that descended is the same that ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. By Him the sacrificial work is done to reconcile all things to God, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens; and meanwhile we have been already reconciled, so as to await with joy His coming in glory. But when He does come, He with His glorified bride will take the universe, heavenly and earthly, as the scene of His glory. To make His kingdom the earth only is as false as to confine it to heaven. Scripture excludes the narrowness of either view, one of which obtained in sub-apostolic times, as the other in modern. The truth, as usual, is larger than all; and the truth demands both, worthily to magnify the Lord who is the true

Melchizedek and will bring forth bread and wine to refresh the returning victors. For there and then too captivity will be led captive. The faith that unselfishly refused the world conquers the world that had for a while the upper hand.

Such is the action of the Royal Priest in that day: not offering sacrifice, nor burning incense, but with suited refreshment when the victory is won at the end of the age, and God proves Himself the Most High, the highest rivals being overthrown. It is emphatically blessing, as that day will be its irrefragable evidence. And the word of blessing is twofold: Abram (representing Israel as their father) blessed on the part of the Most High God, "the possessor of heavens and earth"; and on the other side, "blessed be the Most High, who delivered thine enemies into thy hand," Melchizedek thereon receiving tithes as duly and gratefully rendered.

But in Hebrews, as we may see, what is future exercise is barely alluded to. It is beautifully pointed out how significant is the name and place first being interpreted king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem which is king of peace." For this alone can be according to God, whether for heaven or for earth, for the Christian now or for Israel by-and-by: no true peace save on a basis of accepted righteousness. How blessed and sure this is every believer ought to know. What is dwelt on mainly is the "order" of this priest, in contrast with Aaron's order where limits of age and succession were indispensable. Here it is one sole ever-living priest: "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." Not of course that as a matter of fact Melchizedek had not parents, forefathers if not descendants, birth and death,

as other men. For the notion of an angel, or divine power, or Christ, are as absurd as that of Shem, etc. Scripture intentionally veils all these; and the priest-king suddenly appears on the scene and vanishes from the inspired history, so as to furnish the typical shadow of our Lord as the Royal Priest. Hence he is said to be "likened, or assimilated, to the Son of God": language quite improper, if the Son of God had then really appeared. All we see of him is that "he abides a priest continuously." Nothing else is recorded. There is no preparatory record, and no sequel to the story. He is a king-priest without a hint of terminating his office or devolving it on a successor. He abides a priest in perpetuity, or without a break, the contrast of the Aaronic line.

The sketch hitherto given is wonderfully graphic and comprehensive. We come now to closer points of comparison between Melchizedek and Aaron.

"Now behold how great [was] he to whom [22also] Abraham the patriarch cave a tenth out of the spoils. And those indeed out of the sons of Levi that receive the priestly office have commandment to take tithe of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren thou oh having come out from the loins of Abraham. But he that hath no genealogy from them hath tithed Abraham and hath blessed him that had the promises. But apart from all gainsaying the less is blessed by the better. And here dying men receive tithes, but there one hath witness that he liveth. And, so to say, through Abraham Levi also that receiveth tithes hath been tithed; for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him" (verses 4-10).

The facts recorded in the close of Gen. 14 are made the groundwork of weighty teaching. On the one hand the patriarch, whom every Jew locked upon as the historic head of Israel, cave Melchizedek a tenth of all the spoils taken from the vanquished kings. On the other hand Melchizedek as priest of the Most High God23 blessed Abraham most solemnly and significantly. But circumstances were the more notable because they stand out in marked isolation from the ordinary life of the fathers, save where an inconsistency is recorded for our profit and that no flesh might glory. Thus Jacob vowed that if God would be with him and keep him, so that he should return in peace to his father's house, Jehovah should be his God, and he would surely of all He gave him render the tenth to Him (Gen. 28). Yet in the land of the stranger Jacob the pilgrim blessed Pharaoh, king of Egypt though he was (Gen. 47): a simple but real testimony to the superiority of faith over all earthly honour.

But here all is seen reversed to furnish an adequate type of what was due to Christ, however repulsive to Jewish pride and the petty reasoning of man's mind. There was a personage, a king-priest, so great in dignity that Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils at an epoch when God had just crowned himself with singular honour. From this is deduced the undeniable inference, according to a style of teaching which no pious or intelligent Israelite would question, that not Levi only but his priestly sons, the house of Aaron, entitled to tithe their brethren by the law, paid tithes in the person of Abraham to Melchizedek; to one who derived no succession and was absolutely void of genealogical link with the tribe, the priestly family, or with the lineal chief

of them all. There stood the fact in the foundation book of holy Scripture, and of that law to which even the incredulous party of Sadducees clung tenaciously. It was no question of a new revelation, or of a doubtful reading, or of an interpretation that could be challenged. In the plainest terms God had revealed a fact, the bearing of which may never have dawned on any until the Holy Spirit now applied it to Christ so unexpectedly.

Nor was Levi, any more than Aaron, degraded by pointing out the decisive act of Abraham recorded for permanent use in divine revelation, which proved a priestly office superior to the Aaronic. For He to whom Melchizedek stood as type was their own Messiah, Jesus the Son of God. To His mere shadow the father of the faithful, the “friend of God,” bowed down, acknowledging the highest representative of the Most High God, Possessor of heavens and earth, and involving in that willing homage all that sprang from him, even Levi and Aaron. Thus according to God it was shown that Aaron and his house had paid tithes to Melchizedek in their forefather. And herein was no failure of Abraham but an act of faith, of which God has made much, as we all see in the O.T. as well as in the N.T.

But we are directed to more than this. Abraham was a receiver from Melchizedek, who “hath blessed him that had the promises.” These might seem to exempt from the blessing of man the one who had the promises of God more characteristically than any other of the sons of men. But not. so, this royal priest, who had no connection of flesh with Aaron and his sons (whom Jehovah ordained to bless the sons of Israel, putting His name upon them to secure His blessing, Num. 6), Melchizedek blessed Abraham with all publicity and in

the most special manner He blessed Abraham on the part of God Most High, and blessed God Most high on the part of Abraham. But beyond controversy, all gainsaying apart, “the less is blessed by the better.” So in Luke 2 Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary, but ventured not to bless the Babe, even when in another sense he blessed or gave thanks to God. In that Babe his eyes had seen God’s salvation; as in like spirit, though with beautifully suited difference of act, the magi from the cast fell down and worshipped, not the mother but the young Child, and, opening their treasures, offered unto Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh (Matt. 2). Well had it been for the men and women of the west had they pondered the lesson, instead of lapsing into idolatry.

Melchizedek then blessed Abraham; how much indeed is He the Blest and the Blesser of whom that mysterious priest was but the foreshadowing! But another hint is given, more developed later, on which the less may be said now: “And here dying men receive tithes, but there one having witness that he liveth.” This is what we hear of Melchizedek; not a word of his birth or of his death. He is simply presented a “living” priest, with nothing before or after; whereas death is written on Aaron and all his sons, yet are they priests receiving tithes according to the law. But, so to say, the same law attests that through Abraham as the medium Levi too who receives tithes paid tithe in principle — for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him and received the tenth of the spoils. Had Levi been born previously, he might plead independence and exemption. As it was, Israel, Aaron, and all were united in that one man’s homage, the father of the chosen people.

Thus far in our chapter the Scripture unfolded is that given in the close of Gen. 14; and therein is shown a priesthood incontestably superior to that of Aaron, royal in character no less than in place, expressly in relation to God's supremacy, and exercised at the moment of the victory of faith over the hitherto victorious powers of the world. It is distinguished by blessing, emphatically by blessing downwards and upwards, the father of the faithful blessing God Most High, and God Most High blessing him; and we can add from the ancient oracle, as "possessor of heaven and earth": to say nothing more now of the varied points of contrast with Aaron, which can be realised only in that Man who is God, the sole Man of whom the Spirit could say, "The same yesterday, and today, and forever." If Melchizedek in the type abides a priest continuously, the Son of God so abides in very deed.

Three proofs of inferiority in the Levitical priesthood appear. Melchizedek received tithes of him whom all Israel acknowledged as their father and chief. Abraham, the original depositary of the promises and heir of the world, was blessed by the same august personage; and indisputably the less is blessed by the better. Again Levitical priests without exception up to Aaron are but dying men, whereas we only hear of Melchizedek living, without one word of his death. And none can deny that the patriarchal head of the tribe which boasted of the priestly family, if he receive tithes from the people, paid tithes in Abraham to Melchizedek, whose superiority was thus indelibly marked in God's word.

But the scripture quoted already (Heb. 5:6) from the Book of Psalms (Ps. 110:4) is distinct in predicating of the Messiah this highest priesthood of the Most High

God. Here only is found perfection of priesthood. His person and His work alike warrant this confidence. Nowhere else is it, or can it be even conceivably. Jesus only is saluted of God as high priest after the order of Melchizedek, as the inspired psalmist spoke of Jehovah, in the most solemn way, owning Him in this style, alone and for ever. Hence our Epistle deduces another proof of Levitical inferiority. Nor is it to be overlooked that the Most High has a prophetic reference to the day when all hostile power in the world shall be vanquished, and all false gods vanish before Him who is ever the only true God, and will then enforce His claim as Creator and Possessor of heavens and earth. The Lord Jesus, the Royal Priest, will administer the entire universe to the glory of God, at His appearing again. This, however, is not opened out now, as pertaining to the future exercise of the Melchizedek priesthood, instead of its "order" on which the Holy Spirit is expatiating now as the truth here needed.

"If then perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for upon it the people have received the law), what further need that a different priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called [or said to be] after the order of Aaron? For the priest changed, there taketh place of necessity a change also of law. For he of whom these things are said belongeth to a different tribe, from which no one hath given attention to the altar. For evidently out of Judah hath our Lord sprung, as to which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priests (verses 11-14).

If Moses testifies of a prophet to come like himself but greater far, so does David in spirit of an ever-abiding priest according to the order, not of Aaron but of

Melchizedek. This is and secures perfection. It is Jehovah Himself that announces it, long after Aaron, longer still after the historical king-priest of Salem. It unequivocally points to Messiah, but Messiah on the one hand to sit on the right hand of Jehovah, and on the other to strike through kings in the day of His wrath and to judge among the nations. The bearing of this is immediate, powerful, and beyond mistake. Aaronic order gives place to a far surpassing one, of which Melchizedek was but the shadow, in the person and offices of Christ, the centre of all glory, intrinsic and conferred; with the momentous basis of His redemption work, that He might be free to bless righteously, according to all the love and counsels of God, those who could have no other claim, but contrariwise had sin, guilt, and curse. But Ps. 110 also points onward to the future day of His triumph when Israel shall be willing, instead of disobedient as now, and the mightiest kings shall be for the Lord Jesus when He sends the sceptre of His might out of Zion, instead of sitting patiently as now at the right hand of God.

Perfection thus is manifestly not through the Levitical priesthood, which is but provisional, from first to last characterised by infirmity and even sins. and indeed it was to make propitiation for the one and to intercede for the other, with imperfection everywhere attending its transitory nature. How different in every way the true and great Melchizedek! How glorious His place on high! How unfailing too the blessing, not only for those who now believing follow Him in Spirit where He is at God’s right hand, but for those spared on earth when He smites through kings in the day of His anger, and blessing flows here below as the exercise of His

priesthood. God Most High will be then the manifest possessor of heavens and earth; as the rejected but exalted Messiah will be the channel and guarantee of blessing, the King as well as Priest in the displayed glory of that day.

But Israel had the law given them under the condition of the Levitical priesthood, and on no other footing could it be. A faulty people could not draw near to God as things then were with no more than a figurative redemption and sacrifices. A failing priesthood must intervene tremblingly and with rigour of rite and ceremonial, on pain of death if transgressed. There was clearly nowhere in that system perfection": yet perfection there must be to meet the mind, love, and holiness of God. It is attainable and found only in Christ, as it is here shown in Him "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Therefore, as is argued, is the further need of a different priest arising as the Holy Spirit had predicted, according to that supreme order of blessing without fail, the glorified Messiah, and not said to be after Aaron's order. Now the change of the priest necessitates a chance also of law. This is the true statement of inspiration here not of "the law," as has been said by a lively but often erratic commentator, but "of law." There is a totally different principle henceforth. Grace only can save a sinner, not the law, nor a mixture of law and grace, which only the more condemns the guilty as being the less to be excused. It is by grace alone that the believer is or can be saved; through righteousness indeed, but this exclusively in Christ, however truly the faith of Him produces its fruit abundantly through Him unto God's glory and praise. It was when He had made purification of sins, as we read

at the beginning of the Epistle, that He set Himself down on the right hand of the Majesty, though it is only in Hebrews 10 that we learn fully the perfected status of the Christian.

And the change is shown further by the fact which is next noticed, that He of whom these things are said belonged to or had His pare in a different tribe, not Levi but Judah, from which no one had ever been officially attached to the altar. For it was plain before all that our Lord, as it is added, “hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spoke nothing about priests.” The break was as clear as decisive. Messiah was to be born of David’s line, of a virgin espoused to a man of the Solomonic branch: so prophecy declared. And as He on high, after His sacrificial death and His resurrection, was saluted of God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, it was undeniable that the change from Aaron’s family tribe was divinely marked beyond all controversy.

Thus Christianity is essentially different from Judaism; for no doubt man’s rationalism and ethics are radically worthless and false. There is in both, there was for the Jew visibly, a priest and a sacrifice, a sanctuary, and an altar; but their nature wholly differs by the intention and word of God. Therefore there is no excuse for ignorance; for the O.T. prepares for what the N.T. propounds with all plainness of speech. The essence and substance of all blessing to faith is in Christ, rejected of men and of the Jew especially, but risen and at God’s right hand, and we who believe belong to Him for heaven, as this Epistle elaborately proves. He is coming to bring us there in His own likeness. Every Christian is already not sanctified or hallowed only but perfected by His one offering. But in

these days of declension and self-complacency, is there aught that Christians need to learn of God more than their own Christianity as He has revealed it, unless it be Christ Himself on whom all depends? Even saints are slow to believe the grace and glory of His cross, as they instinctively shirk the crucifixion of the world to them and of themselves to the world which it entails. But this is the word of the Lord for His own now (Gal. 6:14).

It has been shown then that a change of priesthood (and consequently of the law also) was involved in the priest addressed by God in Psalm ex. As the subject of the Psalm is confessedly Messiah and so of necessity David's son, He must spring out of Judah, not out of Levi as did the house of Aaron. But there is another and far weightier difference to which he next proceeds; He was David's Lord. No wonder that singular dignity of office attached to a person so glorious. He was no priest according to the law.

"And it is yet more abundantly evident if (or, since) according to the similitude of Melchizedek ariseth a different priest who hath been made, not according to the law of fleshly commandment, but according to power of indissoluble life. For it is witnessed, Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek. For there is a putting away of a foregoing commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law perfected nothing), and an introduction of a better hope, through which we draw nigh to God" (verses 15-19).

It was conceivable that a more exalted being might have taken up, in the sovereign will of God, the priesthood of Aaron, and shed new lustre on it according to His

superior glory. But the Holy Spirit here leads the writer to press, not only the change already urged, but the still more striking distinction of a different (ἕτερος, not ἄλλος merely) priest to arise according to the likeness of Melchizedek. This leaves Aaron or any successor of his, and the law with which they were bound up, completely aside. Thus the great weight of the testimony extracted from Psalm 110 comes more and more into evidence. Of Messiah it speaks beyond controversy, of His intermediate position at the right hand of God, of the divine recognition of His priesthood after the order, not of Aaron but of Melchizedek, and not only of His kingdom, introduced as it is here and elsewhere shown to be, by divine power and judgment of His foes. And the more intelligently that Psalm and others are read, the more convergent the light on Christ, and the more indubitable the inference in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the truth alike of Jewish hopes for the future and of Christianity at present.

For it is the rejected Messiah that we see all through the Psalms, opposed by the nations and peoples, by kings and rulers; but God declares His decree not only to set His anointed on Zion, but to give Him the nations for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, when He will rule them with a rod of iron and break them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Clearly this is not yet accomplished; nor has Messiah yet asked for it. He is waiting on the Father’s throne. He will at His coming sit on His own throne, when those who are now being called shall reign with Him in glory. Meanwhile we have to pray that our hearts be directed into God’s love and Christ’s patience (2 Thess. 3:5). We now keep the word of His patience (Rev. 3:10). As He is

waiting on high, so are we below, knowing that He that shall come will come and will not tarry. If made a little lower than the angels, He is because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour in a higher and larger sphere than David's Son in Zion. He is the suffering but exalted Son of man in heavenly glory, and about to come with the clouds of heaven, invested with universal dominion, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him: an everlasting dominion and a kingdom which shall not be destroyed.

But while He waits on high, He is active as a priest in sustaining His own suffering ones, tried as they are on earth. And the order of His priesthood is not after the likeness of Aaron but of Melchizedek. It was not the day of His power when He came the first time. He was crucified in weakness then. So only could there be reconciliation to God by His blood. Redemption otherwise was impossible, and that glorification of God concerning sin without which there could be no righteous, no stable, blessing for anyone or anything. Now the infinite work of atonement is wrought and accepted; and He who was delivered for our offences was raised for our justification, is at the right hand of God, and also maketh intercession. He died for the nation too, as well as to gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad, though the application of His work to "the nation" awaits the hour of their repentance and faith in Him, their own Messiah, whom they slew by the hand of lawless men. He will sit as a priest on His throne when Jehovah shall send the rod of Messiah's might out of Zion.

But He discharges priestly functions, a priest for us now, and He only is competent and all-sufficient and must

needs be so; as the very essence of His order is that, like Melchizedek, He stands alone with no companion in it nor subordinates, with neither predecessor nor successor, the one sole Priest after the order of Melchizedek. The day of His wrath is future and introduces His kingdom; for He is Jehovah as well as Messiah. Thus it is that Jehovah shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall Jehovah be one and His name one: never till then a universal religion and universal kingdom, but all this then for the God of Israel in the person of the Lord Jesus as the word makes plain.

And the heavens shall no longer be aloof, but be united in homage to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Then He will have the glorified, who shall reign with Him. The suffering church will be manifested in His heavenly Bride. Nor is anythine, more opposed to all truth than that they are so reigning24 now one of the evil roots of popery and of other self-exalting delusions. On the contrary now is the time to suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. It is an error as old as the ease and honour loving Corinthians in the germ at least. See how nobly the apostle dissipates it as chaff in 1 Cor. 4:8-16; comparing 1 Cor. 6:1-9; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 1 Cor. 9:24, 25; 1 Cor. 15:23, 24, 42-58. But in fact where is not this truth underlying if not on the surface? The reign of Christ and His heavenly ones will take in the heavens, but be over (not, on) the earth.

But to return to our chapter, the reasoning is conclusive. The chance to a different priest of unique and surpassing glory is the teaching of that O.T. which every true Jew owns to be divine. The infirmity of the Levitical priesthood is thereby demonstrated, and Christ alone answers to the type of Melchizedek. He is beyond

controversy the other and different priest that arises, who has been so made or constituted, not after a law of fleshly commandment but after a power of indissoluble life. For He is testified of, Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek. What can be conceived plainer or more conclusive? Even the royal priest who blessed Abraham was but typical and shadowy. The body is Christ's. Aaron's priesthood was fleshly, Christ's according to power of an imperishable life. It is as risen and in heaven that He is Melchizedek Priest.

Our chapter however draws a still larger deduction, not only an incomparably higher priesthood, to which Aaron's gives place, but disannulling of a foregoing commandment as weak and unprofitable; for, as is added parenthetically, the law perfected nothing. Christ is not only perfect Himself "but brings in perfection, and in every way. And this is what was implied in Heb. 6: l — "let us go on unto perfection." It really is Christianity in contradistinction from Judaism, wherein even the heirs were under age (Gal. 4: The Christian is a son and heir of God, and we know it by the Spirit of His Son sent forth into our hearts and crying, Abba, Father. Compare also Rom. 8.

Thus the change of the priesthood from the order of Aaron to that of Melchizedek is shown to be exceeding deep and wide and permanent. Even now, whatever glorious results are in the womb of the future, there is on one hand an abolishing of antecedent injunction because of its weakness and unprofitableness, but on the other an inbringing of a better hope, the parenthesis simply summing up and clenching in a few pithy words the failure of the law to perfect anything. Perfection is in

and by Christ alone. and this by grace so fully as to glorify God and meet the believer's need in everything — even as to the body at His coming again.

But meantime "we draw near to God." How blessed! It is the standing truth of access: never true even of Aaron save once a year, and then with solemn rite "lest he die." Now it is alike and always true of the Christian family. For here is no question of differing gift or of special position or local charge. It is the common blessedness of all, due to the work and blood, the person and priesthood, of Christ. "We draw near to God." To assert difference in this is to resuscitate the abolished injunction, and to despise the introduced better hope. It is to set aside the gospel and go back to that law which, if God's word is to be believed, made nothing perfect. This is what is seen in much the greater part of Christendom. It was the wedge of Tractarianism; it is the flag of Ritualism. And it is the weakness of true Christians which leaves the door open for all such dark rebellion against divine grace and truth. For to say that there are no priests now on earth is but half a truth. The truth is that Christ is the great Priest on high, and that believers now on earth and since Pentecost are free of the sanctuary. "We draw near to God." How so if we have not priestly nearness of access? To claim or allow that some have it for others virtually denies Christianity.

But the perfection goes far beyond our being now made of age, in contrast with legal minority, as we shall find throughout this Epistle and in what remains no less than in what we have had; so that this need not be more than noticed according to the brief allusion in the text.

Only it is well to observe that the A.V. of the passage is untenable, and so are the various antecedent translations. ‘Thus Wiclif muddles the entire context, though he is right as to the last clause. It is the more curious as the Vulgate is correct, which helped the Rhemish, though their English is here clumsy and their punctuation cuts all thread of sense. Tyndale, by failing to see the parenthesis, led the way into the strange error of understanding (seemingly, for it is preposterous) that “the lawe made nothing perfect: but was an introduction,” etc. Cranmer followed in his wake. The English version of Geneva erred in another way of like misapprehension by giving, “the law made nothing perfect: but the bringing in of a better hope made perfect,” etc. The A.V. followed this by inserting “did.” The truth is that no verb is needed other than the text supplies in the beginning of verse 18, which stretches over to verse 19 also. There is a doing away of a foregoing commandment, and an introduction of a better hope, by which we draw near to God: the legal state is annulled, and a better hope supervenes now. It is Christianity, and by it we draw near to God, instead of standing at a distance as being essentially Jewish. There is nothing more characteristic of the gospel, as the result of Christ’s cross and blood-shedding by which we are brought to God. All priesthood for us save Christ’s vanishes away; and Christ’s is to maintain us in that nearness which His work gives us even now, all Christians being priests spiritually.

Another proof of superiority for the priesthood of Christ over Aaron’s is found in the oath which Jehovah is declared to have sworn in the former case, as attested in the same fruitful verse of Psalm 110. We have already

had this argument drawn from His dealings with Abraham after he was tried and found faithful as to the sacrifice of Isaac (Heb. 6:13-18). It was God's appreciation of the faith that surrendered His dearest object, and in the most painfully trying way, to Himself trusted absolutely. For the divine oath was added to the word of promise that, by two unchangeable things in which it was impossible that God should lie, we might have a strong encouragement who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. Here it is yet more solemn as His appreciation of Christ's priesthood which is final and for ever, as being perfectly satisfying to His nature, love, and glory, in His Son as well as the Man who had alone glorified Him even as to sin, competent alike as God and man in one person and perfect in all His work.

"And inasmuch as [it was] not without swearing of an oath (for they have been made priests without swearing of an oath, but he with swearing of an oath by him that saith unto him, Jehovah swore and will not change his mind, Thou [art] priest for ever25), by so much also hath Jesus become surety of a better covenant" (verses 20-22).

The very term employed in this case, swearing of an oath, is more full and formal than the short and familiar word previously and generally used. It would seem that the utmost weight of solemnity is expressed thereby. The only occurrence in the Septuagint is in Ezek. 17:18, 19, where was decided the lot of the profane prince. The Apocrypha has it once (3 Esdr. viii. 93 (90)). In Acts 2:30 the phrase is composed of the two words here combined. The critic Julius Pollux has the word in his Onomasticon (i. 38), not Plato, who uses the plural form differently

accentuated therefore, for asseverations on oath (Phaedr. 241 a, ed. H. Steph.), a form also expressive of the accompanying sacrifice among the heathen like ὅρκια, as the Lexicons cite.

Thus did God mark the incomparable honour of Messiah's priesthood: as the Aaronic was transitory, His for ever. How strange at first sight that a Jew should overlook what was so distinctly involved in this solemnity on Jehovah's part in that dignity peculiar to His own Messiah! But it ceases to be strange, if one reflect on their habitual history, not as they flatter themselves in modern times but as God has recorded it imperishably in His living oracles, where we see them ever stiff-necked and rebellious, ever forsaking their most needed mercies and their brightest glory. All this would be inexplicable if one did not remember the wily adversary, the old serpent, who has wrought with not less ruinous success in Christendom now than in Judaism of old. Nor will that sad history close for either, till Christ appears in His glory for the judgment of both.

But no mark of God's estimation of Christ's priesthood above the Levitical is simpler or surer than swearing as He did when inaugurating Messiah in that position. The deduction is equally irrefragable: "by so much also hath Jesus become surety of a better covenant." If He took aught in hand, if He became responsible, heaven and earth must sooner pass than His word or His work. The Second Man stands for ever. And "blessed are all they that put their trust in him." The old covenant cannot be but death and condemnation to the sinner. The new covenant rests on His blood shed for the remission of the believer's sins, and is truly "a better covenant "; as the Jew will one day be the loudest to proclaim,

whatever may be his obstinacy now, proud of what has ruined him and his fathers blind for ages.

“Testament” is here quite out of place; for what has a giver of security to do with making a will? Heb. 9:16, 17 is the sole passage of scripture which requires or even admits of such a sense; and it is there due to “eternal inheritance” in the verse immediately preceding. The word in itself is capable of either sense, meaning in human relations a disposition, especially of property by will, and in divine things a covenant, which naturally predominates in the LXX. and the N.T. The context decides with certainty. Thus in Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, remission of sins is expressly bound up with the “new covenant” (not testament) as in Jer. 31:31-34. Even the Vulgate has here “novum foedus,” not testamentum, which ought to have sufficed to have kept Jerome right in the Gospels. And what has “blood” to do with a “will”? That it should be the basis of a covenant is a familiar truth. A will or testament is unknown to the O.T. Not less clearly is it the God of Israel’s “holy covenant,” as it is rightly rendered in Luke 1:72: testament can have no relation to the oath sworn to Abraham; though the Vulgate gives that word followed by Wiclif and the Rhemish translators, as it misled all the English in the three texts first referred to in the Synoptic Gospels. Acts 3:25, Acts 7:8, are equally plain for “covenant”; and there all the English versions are correct, save Wiclif and the Rhemists, servile as usual to the Vulgate. But they were all inexcusable, particularly as to Acts 7:8, which directly alludes to Gen. 17, where the Vulgate has uniformly “pactum,” never once “testamentum.”

The Epistles are just as unambiguous. Thus in Rom. 9:4, “the covenants” (cf. Gal. 4:24 and Eph. 2:12) can be the only right sense, referring to Jer. 31:31 for the new, and to Ex. 24:8 for the first or old. Here the Vulgate follows the erroneous singular, as in B D E F G, etc., against the true text in and the mass of uncial and cursive copies, etc. (save that A and L omit so as to be out of court), and all critics except Lachmann, who, great a scholar as he was, can never be reckoned on for a spiritual judgment. The English are right, save Wiclif and the Rhemists and the margin of the A.V. In Rom. 11:27 the meaning is beyond doubt “covenant,” as in the English with the same exceptions; where the error of the Vulgate is the more flagrant, because in Isa. 59:21 it gives “foedus” rightly, yet mistranslates as usual in the N.T. citation. 1 Cor. 11:25 falls under the remarks on the Lord’s Supper in the Gospels, as already seen. 2 Cor. 3:6-14 can only mean a new covenant” and “the old covenant,” the reference being indisputable; yet here the influence of the Vulgate misled all the English discreditably. Even Beza had corrected himself; for while wrong in his editions of 1559, 1565, and 1582, he abandons “test.” and substitutes “pactum” in his last two editions of 1588 and 1598, though without a reason given in his notes. The connection of Gal. 3:15 is conclusive for the more general “covenant” even though human only, rather than the narrower ‘testament,” which is here more excusable in the Vulgate Wiclif, Tyndale, Cranmer, and the version of Rheims, while the Geneva rendering of 1557 led the A.V. to “covenant,” with “testament” in the margin. This is confirmed by verse 17, where a last “will” or “testament” cannot rightly be understood, though here again we have the same parties similarly ranged. In Heb. 4:24 the A.V. alone of English is correct, with the

marginal alternative for which there was no good reason. In Eph. 2:12 the Geneva V. was the forerunner of the A.V., Beza being right all through.

This brings us, according to the usual arrangement, to our Epistle, and to this the first mention of the word, where “covenant” has been shown to be right. In Heb. 8:6, 8, 9 (twice), and 10 it is unmistakably and uniformly “covenant”; for what has a “mediator” to do with a testament? Other proofs are so obvious as to need no further pointing out. So in Heb. 9:4 the ark was of the “covenant,” with which a will or testament had no congruity and with the “tables” too in the same verse. It has been remarked also that “a mediator” goes with “a covenant,” not a testament (verse 15), and the bearing of the “first covenant” is determined by O.T. reference. “Testament” it cannot be. But the inspiring Spirit, in the parenthesis of verses 16, 17, avails Himself of the signification so familiar to all who spoke or read Greek, in order to impress the place that death has for introducing and giving effect to the blessing of the Christian. A covenant does not imply in any case the death of the covenanter to give it validity; a testament invariably supposes the testator’s death to bring it into operation. All learning or argument to set aside “testament” and “testator” here is but beating the air. Equally vain is it to establish “testament” in verse 15, or in 18 and 20, where “covenant” alone suits and alone warranted by the O.T. God enjoined a covenant, not a testament, and that by blood. The same proof applies no less stringently to Heb. 10:16-29, Heb. 12:24, and Heb. 13:20, as also to Rev. 11:19.

Now these are all the occurrences in the N.T.; and the sum is that “testament” is out of place everywhere save

in Heb. 9:16, 17, where alone special contextual bearing gives occasion to that sense; whereas the universal O.T. force prevails in every other. The question is here gone into fully, that no reader may allow the unbelieving notion of the least uncertainty hanging over the usage. It is in vain and even injurious to parade a crowd of the learned men opposed to another crowd not less learned, save to prove that our faith ought in no case to rest on man but on God's word and Spirit. Thus regarded, the uncertainty of men confirms the 'believer in the value of the provisions of God's grace and word.

Another proof of superiority over the Levitical priesthood is claimed for our Lord Jesus in His abiding triumph over death, from which neither Aaron nor his successor had exemption any more than other men. They all succumbed to death, which rendered their priesthood necessarily successional in order to its very existence.

"And they have been made priests more in number, because they are hindered by death from continuing. but he, because he abideth for ever, hath the priesthood unchangeable:26 whence also he is able to save completely those that approach to God through him, ever living as he is to intercede for them" (verses 23-25).

The text had already been applied twice in this chapter (8, 16): the first time, in reasoning on the type of Melchizedek paid tithe to and testified of only as "living," Scripture being as silent about his death as about his birth (whereas under the law none but "dying" men received tithes); the second time, in contrasting the respective principles, a law of carnal injunction, weak and profitless on the one side, and on the other, power

of indissoluble life through the perfection of which we draw near to God. Here, as has been remarked, we have the Holy Spirit noticing the appointment of numbers of priests Levitical, because death hindered continuance; whereas the high priest of our confession, because of His abiding for ever, “hath the priesthood unchangeable.” The personal contrast of His abiding for ever, with the many sons of Aaron who could not but pass away through death, emphasises the priesthood in His case as indefeasible.

Nor can any demonstration be conceived so convincing and irrefutable. For death tells the tale of man’s weakness and sin; and the more as he was constituted to live with suitable provision for it, had he obeyed God. Nevertheless Jesus did taste of death, but in no way by sin, yet for it as a sacrifice. BY the grace of God He tasted death for every one (or, thing). And this infinite act of His love not only availed for us before God in a way and measure with which nothing else Pan compare, but gave occasion to display the power of an imperishable life in Him. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” When Scripture records its remarkable list of antediluvians (Gen. 5) living 930, 912, 910, 895, 962, 969, 777 years, the solemn words follow in each case, “and he died.” Had Jesus lived as many as any, or double the oldest, men might still have said, Wait and see what the end will be. But He, after living as man just long enough to do the will of God perfectly, at its climax laid down His life in a single generation, that He might take it again in resurrection. Thus was marked out, on the one hand, the annulling of Satan’s power in his last fortress of death, on the other the victory of the Son of God after full submission to God’s judgment of

sin. It was His resurrection that proclaimed death defeated. He only is the Living One, who became dead and is now alive again for ever more, in possession of the keys of death and Hades. And as thus living again He carries on His priesthood on high.

Therefore is there but One. Death has no more dominion over Him, as sin never had. No successor is needed, none to replace Him who ever abides. Vain search! for none else had the qualification. Through death there was no continuance. Hence is He in manifest contrast with Aaron's sons who followed in a family succession more numerous than the sons of David, till He came, the promised and predicted Son, who is the King after God's heart not in type alone but reality, as He is the Priest, the one Mediator whose love and effectual love has been proved to the uttermost in dying for our sins, and who now lives to sustain, guard, and sympathise as well as intercede on our behalf who believe.

And the power by which He lives for ever is the guarantee of a commensurate salvation (verse 25). For if the priests, the sons of Aaron, could not save themselves from death, still less could they save others. Christ only when His work was done, which made His death necessary for sinners, having been perfected became author of everlasting salvation to all that obey Him. "For if, being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved in his life," i.e. in virtue of it. He abides for ever, and because it is so He has His priesthood unchangeable Thus also He is able to save completely those that approach to God through Him. In His case it is not the cold or poor plea of a divinely ordained office administered by an unworthy occupant, which brought

death on many a son of Aaron as we may see in early days, and which filled with grief and shame far more "Israelites indeed" to the end of the sad story. If the law made nothing perfect, still less did the numerous priests as they succeeded one another supply strength and profit.

But here the glorious presence of God's Son gives a fresh and unfading and incalculable lustre to the office, enhanced as all is by an unwavering obedience which glorified His Father absolutely. He therefore is the sole priest able to save completely (εἰς τὸ παντελὲς) those that approach to God through Him, since He ever lives to intercede for them. As their need here below is great and unceasing so is He above always free, competent, and efficacious to interpose on their behalf. Do they approach by Him to God? He saves them throughout and entirely. Divine love and righteousness are thus at one in carrying through to God's glory and salvation in the face of every difficulty or danger. Nor is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven that is given anion(, men whereby we must be saved.

The superiority of the true Melchizedek is thus shown in every respect incontestable and manifest; and in the unjealous ways of grace His purity and His glory are bound up with the heavenly dignity of the believer, as it is here expressed.

"For such a high priest [also27] became us,28 holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, who hath no need day by day, as the high priests, first for his own sins to offer up sacrifices, then [for] those of the people; for this he did once for all, having offered up himself. For the law

appointeth men high priests having infirmity; but the word of the oath-swearing that [was] after the law, a Son perfected for ever" (verses 26-28).

The reason assigned (for the sentence takes that shape) is made all the more striking when compared with a designedly similar one in Heb. 2:10. "For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." The glory of God, His truth, His justice, had been compromised if sin were not judged unsparingly in His person Whose grace made Him responsible for all its consequences. Therefore did it become God to make Him who knew no sin sin for us. Here no less wonderfully does the Holy Spirit say that "it became us" to have a high priest in every point of view and beyond comparison superior to the Aaronic line. "For such a high priest became us," not only of purity unexampled but made "higher than the heavens," the glorious place in which the Epistle loves to regard Him, due to His personal and divine dignity, but taken as the result of His atoning death before God for a heavenly family and their need through sin.

The word "holy" should be considered. In Greek as in Hebrew two expressions are employed: one (ἅγιος) to imply separateness for God from evil, the other (ὅσιος) graciousness, which said of God means His mercy, said of man means his piety. It is the latter term which is here rendered "holy," a holiness full of loving-kindness. Next, ἄκακος is poorly translated "harmless" as in the A.V.: and "guileless" as in the Revision answers to ἄδολος. In Christ it rises to a total absence of evil found in none else. "Undefiled" declares Him untainted by the corruptions that surrounded Him when here below,

where His moral beauty shone on all who had eyes to see, above all in His Father's who bore witness from heaven.

Appropriately therefore is He next said to be "separated from sinners," not from sins only, as the Pesch-Syriac says, but from sinners. What was ever morally true was crowned in His leaving the world behind, the enduring effect of a completed age, and so leads on to the only place befitting Him, "made higher than the heavens." There He exercised His high-priestly functions, having laid the ground in His propitiatory work on the cross. It should surprise none to hear that such a place became Him. Revelation declares that such a high priest "became us." Divine righteousness does not justify us only but sets us in and as Christ before God (John 16:2 Cor. 5); or, according to the doctrine of our Epistle, constitutes us holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, and (as we shall see) exhorts us to approach with a true heart, as having boldness for entering into the holies by the blood of Jesus. It is not then because we were anything good of ourselves, but on the contrary because we are so blessed, objects of perfect favour, and bound for glory under an unfailing Leader, that "such a high priest became us," in contrast with the earthly people who had high priests like themselves.

In verse 27 is a brief exclusion of the shortcomings of earthly priesthood, leaving its full discussion to a later moment. Aaron and his successors needed day by day to offer up sacrifices, first for their own sins, then for the people's — Christ once for all when He offered Himself, which is the clearest token of absolute sinlessness, and according to the worth of His person was infinitely effectual for others, as He needed nothing on His own

part. This the previous verse demonstrated, if proof were asked, though it ought not to be. And the whole is clenched by verse 28: “For the law constituteth men high priests, having infirmity.” All here was imperfection. “But the word of the oath-swearing that was since the law [constituteth] a Son perfected for ever.” “Son” is characteristic, and hence has not the article, though He be the Only-begotten but not here a designated object; so that the language is perfectly correct. Its insertion would make Himself prominent rather than His near relationship to God. The perfect participle passive here as in verse 26 points to the permanent character acquired, and not to the simple fact as the aorist would express. As in His severance from sinners, so in His having completed all for His priestly place, it is the lasting result of either terminated act. In Heb. 2:10 it is the act itself on God’s part.

20 I know not why Dean Alford spoke of the second article here omitted “with B”; for the Vatican gives it as all do, save a few cursives. The Complut. omitted it, followed by Beza and the Elzevirs; but Erasmus, Colinaeus, and R. Steph. duly inserted it; and so the modern editors.

21 Ὃς is read by the great Uncials, and so one cursive known to us; yet 6 seems right (C L and most) and to have got the σ from the word following. The relative supposes a needless anacoluthon. No wonder that Tischendorf and Westcott and Hort here desert Lachmann and Tregelles.

22 The “also” or “even” is doubtful, though it has good and ancient evidence.

23 We may notice, by the way, the utter ignorance of the Pentateuch evinced by the different document system. For the names of God, Elohim, Jehovah, El-Elyon, El-Shaddai, are required by their context to express the truth adequately, instead of the nonsensical assumption of various, strung together at a date long after Moses. The scheme is not only superficial but false and sceptical.

24 I am aware of the reading of A B and some 26 cursives in Rev. 5:10. But undoubtedly the external counter-evidence of P and 30 cursives, some of no common weight, and of the best Latin copies, preponderates. If it were otherwise even, the believer standing on the analogy of the faith can distinctly pronounce present reigning an error. Compare the absurd reading of the excellent Alex. MS. in Rev. 20:5. We must beware of idolising the witnesses. “On” the earth too is not grammatically sound after βασ. It should be “over.”

25 The best copies and versions omit the rest of the citation here; as B read καὶ in 22.

26 It is

ἀπαράβατος. Theodoret and other Greek fathers interpret it as “unsuccessional,” which makes excellent sense. But usage points rather to “unchangeable” or intransmissible, untransferable.

27 A B D E, and both Syriac versions, add

καὶ “also.” It may be noticed that by a misprint Tischendorf gives ὑμῖν “you,” instead of “us.” By a similar inadvertence heaps of various readings arose among the copyists of old.

28 Ibid.

Hebrews 8

The truth of Christ as high priest, most important for the Christian and especially for such as had been Hebrews, has thus far been richly unfolded accorded to the order of Melchizedek, but not without a glance at its exercise after the type of Aaron, yet even here immeasurably superior even to frequent contrast. This however demands further development, and first as connected with “a better covenant which was established upon better promises.” The contrast of the first or legal covenant with a second and new one, never to grow old or vanish away, occupies our present chapter for the most part. But it opens with a reproduction of what has been laid down already under a brief heading.

“Now, as a summary on what is being said, we have such a high priest who sat down on [the] right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man” (verses 1, 2).

The glory of Christ’s person, Son of God and Son of man, is developed in Heb. 1 and 2 and in both with His work (not only for purging us, but) to vindicate God, annul the power of evil, reconcile all things, succour the tried, and bring many sons to glory. This is the admirable introduction, followed by His office of Apostle and High Priest for those who are pilgrims passing through the wilderness of the world to the rest of God, as we see in Heb. 3, 4; and it is precisely to such, no longer in Egypt but with Canaan in view, that the priesthood of Christ applies, as is shown in 4, 5, 6, along with the hindrances by the way, the awful peril of going back, and the

grounds and motives for the full assurance of hope to the end. Heb. 7 is an elaborate proof from first to last of the Melchizedek priesthood, fulfilled not yet in its exercise but in its order in Christ, altogether and incontestably beyond that of Aaron.

If therefore a Hebrew Christian were in danger of pining after a Levitical high priest as drawing near to God for a moment on behalf of the ancient people of God, could he fail to see the infinite superiority of Christ in this very respect? It is not that Israel had one, and we Christians have not. Their own scriptures attest another and far higher coming, mysteriously bound up with the Messiah, to which their God was pledged by an oath, and this to abide for ever. There stands the promise in Psalm 110, and now it is beyond cavil accomplished in Jesus dead, risen, and glorified. It is inexcusable unbelief to evade this word of God. What a blessing to receive it as our assured portion in God's grace! "We have such a high priest" to maintain us consistently with all that God is and loves as fully revealed, and with Christ's work already wrought and perfect, to sustain us in our weakness, to sympathise with our every trial and pang. His position declares His unique and incomparable dignity, His intimate nearness to God in glory. His seat is "at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens," a stronger statement even than what was given at the starting-point of the Epistle (Heb. 1:3). "Throne" is added now, and in the "heavens" take the place of "on high." Could the most prejudiced Israelite fail to perceive the superior dignity and efficacy of such a high priest far above Aaron or the most favoured of his line? Nor could he deny the absolute authority of the scripture which reveals the divine intention now carried

out in it. Is it for Jews to doubt the glory of the Messiah or the blessing achieved and secured to those that are His?

There has Christ taken His seat. It is calm and permanent intimacy where no believer can dispute the greatness, and the power, and the glory, any more than the love, and tender interest, and unfailing support. — He is “minister of the holies,” in no merely typical sense to bring truth down palpably to infantine minds. It is the house of heavenly worship and divine glory in its fullest reality and grandeur. Therein Christ ministers according to the nicest consideration of the living God, as the sole person suited to Him and to us equally and in perfection, true God and real man, who obeyed unto death (yea, of the cross), that God’s honour should be retrieved and His love meet with a love like His own who died for our sins when we were as powerless as ungodly, and thus again proved divine love to the uttermost no less than holiness and righteousness. Such is the minister of the holies, that God in the heavens and the saints on the earth should be adequately conciliated, even in the time of our present infirmity and exposure to temptation.

Thus the high priest we boast is exactly in keeping with “the tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man.” For less and other than He would not suffice for the majesty of God, or for His grace. And as “the Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into his hand,” so does He delight in having Him ever nearest to Himself, that He may give us to enjoy His own ineffable satisfaction in Christ’s laying down His life that He might take it again (not merely laying it down for the sheep, John 10:15 compared with 17); so too in all the efficacy of His office maintaining us in harmony with Himself in heavenly

glory, notwithstanding our pitiable weakness and the rude storms and hostility of the world we pass through.

We have noticed already that the ground of the Epistle is the wilderness, not the land; and so here is the "tabernacle," rather than the temple which would suit the rest actually come, not the pilgrimage. This is full of instruction which Christendom has overlooked and abandoned. Great is the spiritual gain for such as seize the truth by divine teaching and are practically faithful. For nature chafes at the walk of faith and craves what is "settled" or "established" (2 Sam. 7), on the specious plea that the world is Jehovah's and the fulness of it, for any present enjoyment as well as to adorn His sanctuary; as the royal and rich adorn for themselves a house of cedars. Whereas in truth since redemption to this day He had walked in a tent and in a tabernacle, nor had ever spoken a word to any, saying, Why build ye not Me a house of cedars? This is reserved for His Son, the Man of peace, when the sharp sword proceeding out of His mouth shall have smitten the nations in revolt, and the Man whose name is the Branch shall grow up out of His place and build the temple of Jehovah. Even He shall build the temple of Jehovah; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zech. 6). It is still the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus, not yet Himself come to reign in power and glory over the earth. We are nothing if not heavenly, as He is for us in the heavens, minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man.

Even the tabernacle of old needed its gold and silver and precious things, as the Levitical high priest his varied

jewels on his shoulders and breast. Ours is the true tabernacle on high where all is the glory of God and of His Son in the power of redemption. There created ornaments have no place. There Christ ministers, and thither we approach by faith, looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. And no less than the Holy Spirit of God is given us as God's children to make this access real and full of peace and joy. How sorrowful for any thus blessed to "turn again to the weak and beggarly elements" of earthly sights and shows and seasons like Israel, or to conceive that corruptible things as silver and gold can be acceptable in the hour now come, when God must be worshipped, if at all, in spirit and truth — worshipped also as the Father, Christ's Father and our Father, His God and our God.

The immeasurable superiority of Christ as High-Priest will appear in Heb. 9, 10. with the fullest evidence. Here the Holy Ghost only lays down the principle in a few words that His is a real active function and not a mere title, His heavenly glory only giving additional force to His functions.

"For every high priest is constituted to offer both gifts and sacrifices: wherefore [it is] necessary that this one also have something to offer. If then29 he were upon earth, he would not even be a priest, since there are those30 that offer the gifts according to* law, such as serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, even as Moses is divinely warned when about to complete the tabernacle: for See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown to thee in the mountain. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry,

inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, such as [since it] is enacted upon better promises" (verses 3-6).

Thus the very aim of high-priesthood is presentation of what is acceptable to God and needed in the highest degree by man. Ministry of the word is essentially different, the communication to man of what God reveals. As the former characterised the Jewish system, so does the latter Christianity, and, it may be added, most distinctively the gospel of God's grace proclaimed in the whole creation that is under heaven. Ministry of the church also could only be when the church was called into being Here it is not in question, any more than the "great mystery" of which it is part.

But there is another consideration, to which the type in the Book of Numbers gives marked and repeated expression (Num. 3:9; Num. 8:19; Num. 18:6, 7), which ought not to be overlooked. The Levites as a whole, whatever their distinctions of ministry, were given to Aaron and his sons; they were wholly, absolutely, given to serve Aaron on behalf of the children of Israel. Thus was the ministry of the tabernacle made essentially dependent on the Aaronic priesthood; and it had no place or propriety otherwise. The outward service entirely hung for its value and acceptance on the inner worship. The tribe of Levi was joined to Aaron and ministered to him, and had no other reason of existence. Undoubtedly the priesthood being now changed, of necessity a new change of law takes place. But the principle abides. After the likeness of Melchizedek there stands up a different priest, who has been made after the power of an indissoluble life, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man. All real service, as it flows from the Lord, so depends on Him in the sanctuary and refers to Him there. Otherwise it becomes false, if the source be made human or the motives be of the world. The Lord can be no party to His own dishonour. How all-important for His servants to test themselves by what is not merely an O.T. type but the plainly revealed truth of the apostolic Epistles! The Holy Spirit is the power of all true ministry; but He works in us that we may serve the Lord Jesus, and there is the same Lord whatever may be the diversities of ministrations. On Him within the rent veil hangs all the worth and efficacy of what is ministered here below.

He who in personal dignity and official honour surpasses both Aaron and Melchizedek did not fall short in what He had to offer. He offered up what neither one nor other could on their part, what He only could — He offered up Himself (Heb. 7:27); and it was once for all, for therein alone was the perfection of gift and sacrifice, as God marked His acceptance of all by seating Him at His own right hand in the heavens. It is no question here of propitiation but of His service in the true tabernacle. Propitiation was exceptional, and in it the high priest represented the people as well as his own house. None but he could do it, as the type of Christ lifted up from the earth on the cross; yet it was not his regular priestly service as setting forth the Lord's ministry now on high.

"If then he were on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there are those that offer the gifts according to law, such as serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things," etc. (verses 4, 5). Christ is characteristically to the Christian the heavenly Priest. On earth He could

have no sacerdotal place: God had called Aaron and his sons in succession to minister and to serve therein; and, when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, such there were still offering the gifts according to law. Christ's priesthood was wholly different, of sovereign grace and exercised in glory, as was due to His person and His work, when the first man had fully displayed his failure, sin, and ruin, in the rejection of the promised Messiah, the Son of God, come in divine love to bless. But the chosen people, priests, and rulers would have none of Him; and in His death by lawless hands propitiation was wrought; and the risen Christ entered that sanctuary on high, where ever living He alone maintains His own in their weakness here below according to the efficacy of His sacrifice which has made purification of their sins. As yet the earthly Aaronic priesthood carried on their service, which was but a representation and shadow of the heavenly things, "according as Moses is oracularly told when about to make the tabernacle. For See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown to thee in the mountain."

In Christ all is real and enduring, as it is divinely and humanly perfect, the person, the work, and the priesthood, as indeed all else. No one beforehand could have conceived any one of them; yet when the facts came out, he who believes is thenceforth satisfied that not one of them could be otherwise, if God were to be glorified and man blessed now and evermore. A human priesthood on earth for Christian people is apostasy from the truth of the Son perfected for ever and ministering high according to power of indissoluble life; it is to rehabilitate the defunct Aaronic order, disannulled because of its weak and unprofitable nature;

it is virtually to deny the very gospel of salvation which announces to all who believe that the blood of Jesus at once blots out their sins, and brings themselves nigh to God in a constant nearness, far beyond what the sons of Aaron and Aaron himself ever enjoyed (Heb. 10:19). And if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. For He is able to save completely those that approach through Him unto God, always living as He is to make intercession for them.

We see the importance of Aaron's intervention in the Pentateuch when the people and his own sons had sinned (Lev. 10; 16), to say nothing of the beautiful type of the budding priestly rod which grace conferred on him to bring through the desert those for whom Moses' authoritative rod could only have assigned and executed death. "But now hath he (Christ) obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, the which (or, such as) is enacted upon better promises" (verse 6). Of this covenant we shall hear more and of its promises in the quotation from the O.T. which follows.

The object of the Holy Spirit is to prove the inferiority of the first covenant, to which Jewish unbelief was clinging, as pertinaciously as their fathers of old were prone to abandon it for any idol. Such alas! is the selfwill of man, from which no favours from God deliver, short of redemption and a new life in Christ. But as in Heb. 7 we had the Levitical priest set aside by One after the order of Melchizedek according to Psalm 110, so Heb. 8 with no less conclusiveness sets before us a new covenant promised in the unerring word.

“For, if that first had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second. For, finding fault, he saith to them, Behold, days come, saith Jehovah, and I will consummate a new covenant as regards the house of Israel, and as regards the house of Judah” (verses 7, 8).

It is in vain for men to reason in an abstract way against the word of God. It was He that inaugurated the covenant of Sinai which confronted the self-confidence of fallen man and, if it had been used aright, would have convicted him of his evil and compelled him to look to Christ, the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. But Israel, like other natural men, perverted the law to make out a spurious righteousness of their own, and to cloak their sins under the smoke of their sacrifices; the end of which things is death, as the Jews were soon to prove even outwardly.

God is free to set aside the old and bring in the new. This He never does arbitrarily, but in goodness, wisdom, and holiness worthy of Himself. But the idea of absolute law is a common delusion of Judaism which some even of their Rabbis repudiated and disproved from Scripture, though Christian theologians, even such a man as Hooker (Eccl. Pol. i. 2, Keble’s ed. i. 204), have not failed to defend and use it controversially. But it is false, the fruit of man’s pride and perversity. God is sovereign: the blessed resource of His nature, to vindicate His name when wronged and insulted, no less than to deliver guilty man from his own evil and Satan’s power. And never was absolute law more mischievously employed than now by sceptics who avail themselves of theological errors to promote their own darker and more deadly unbelief, while concealing the source from which

they derived their poisoned shaft. For they reduce God to nature, and insist on absolute law to deny miracle, prophecy, and revelation generally in any true sense, whatever the fair words in which the milder men deceive themselves and the unwary. But the idea is really heathen (and so Hooker quotes Homer, Merc. Trismegistus, Plato, and the Stoics), however much it delighted Jews and Christians, to say nothing of free-thinkers. For God is light and love, not law, and whatever He may have imposed on the creature, He left Himself entire liberty to work in sovereign grace for good; as He could not but judge what was inconsistent with His nature and majesty, and what rebelled against Him. To send His only-begotten Son to die is not law, any more than through the faith of Him to save sinners that deserve condemnation. It is grace, but through righteousness not ours but His in Christ.

Hence God, as He saw fit to bring in the first covenant, which condemned the sins of the first man, or more definitely of guilty Israel, is no less free to promise a new covenant, bringing out “Jehovah’s righteousness” in the Messiah, the Second man, by whom He can afford to pardon and give the knowledge of Himself to His people, however undeserving. How sad that those who need to the uttermost such saving mercy, should turn a deaf ear and prefer their own foolish reasonings to His word who cannot lie, and who is a Saviour God no less than a judge!

But the Jew objects, so long alas! the leader of the world’s incredulity, that it is the gospel which so proclaims; and this they believe not. Nay, son of Abraham, hear Your own acknowledged and inspired prophet. It is Jeremiah that speaks, full of sorrow over

Judah's apostasy from Jehovah, on which he pronounced speedy and severe judgment. But he divinely comforts by the vision of the final and everlasting restoration in His grace, people and land blessed under the true Beloved their King. He who had unsparingly chastised them for their iniquities, He will rejoice to bless both Israel's house and Judah's house as never of old, and will assuredly plant them in the land then truly glorious with His whole heart and with His whole soul. "Behold, days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness. For thus saith the LORD: David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meal-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne: and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me. Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which

the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? Thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the LORD, If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them" (Jer. 33:14-26).

From a previous chapter (Jer. 31) of this very portion our Epistle quotes. Its bearing on the future and still unaccomplished blessing of all Israel that shall be spared in the latter day is direct, unambiguous, tender, and beautiful.

"Behold, days are coming, saith the LORD, and (or, that) I will consummate a new covenant in respect of the house of Israel, and in respect of the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, in [a] day of my taking their hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt, for they continued not in my covenant, and I disregarded them, saith the LORD" (verses 8, 9).

Equally vain is the dream that the church, or the Christian, is here contemplated. On every sound principle of interpretation the same people, and in its divided houses, is reserved for future blessing, whose iniquities the prophet bewailed and denounced. The truth always suffers by tampering with its integrity or by ignorance. Israel only had the first covenant; Israel by grace will have the second. Israel lost their privileges and land under the old; Israel will be restored and

blessed more than ever and for ever in their land under the new covenant.

Meanwhile we, once Gentiles, who had neither the adoption, nor the glory, nor the covenants, nor the law-giving, nor the promises — we are called by sovereign grace in the gospel to privileges higher far as God's children, and members of Christ's body wherein is neither Jew nor Gentile, blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, as Israel will be blessed in their land, when this age gives way to the new age of Christ displayed in power and glory.

But the death of Christ, which laid the basis for the gospel and also for the church united to Him glorified on high, is the ground of the new covenant also; as the Lord emphatically shows in the institution of His Supper (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), and as the apostle characterises the ministry of the gospel in spirit, not in letter. Hence the application here and in Heb. 10 is as full of comfort to the believing Hebrew, as 1 Peter 2:10 in applying Hosea 2:23. The believer now anticipates all the blessing as far as the higher calling of Christianity admits of it. The earthly part awaits the earthly people; and the days are not yet come for the chosen nation as a whole to be blessed according to the strict and full terms of the prophecy in their own land. Heaven is to us what Palestine will be to Israel, and they will be seen there under Messiah.; as the Christian Jews are now to walk as pilgrims and strangers, waiting for an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading reserved in heaven for them. Israel, not we, are to be sown to Jehovah in the earth; and this not before the day when Jehovah answers the heavens, and the heavens answer the earth.

But it is instructive to consider the terms of the new covenant as here cited from the prophet, though from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew, and not without change even from that.

“For this [is] the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the LORD, Giving my laws into their mind, I will also write them upon their hearts: and I will be to them for God, and they shall be to me for people. And they shall not teach each his [fellow-] citizen and each his brother, crying, Know the LORD, because all shall know me from little one unto great of them” (verses 10, 11).

The essence of the new covenant is that Jehovah undertakes its accomplishment. The first covenant could not but fail, because it depended, not on God but on the Israelite; and the Israelite was already a sinful man. This the law made evident. As long as men only hear, and speak, and judge others (perhaps satisfactorily to themselves), they may keep up a claim of their own righteousness. It is quite another thing when they strive seriously to obey. Then they find out that they are without strength, enemies of God, and ungodly. Christ comes from God to meet the need, giving them life on the faith of Himself, and dying for their sins that they may be remitted of God, never to be remembered more.

But while there was evident propriety, in writing to Hebrew confessors, to quote from the inspired words of Jeremiah, it is an error to assume that the gospel as preached now is the fulfilment of the prediction. It is perfectly legitimate to apply the words to privileges conferred by the gospel without denying that the prophet has in view the days when the house of Israel

and the house of Judah shall alike be blessed under the reign of the Messiah; whereas during gospel times the Gentile is as open to the call of grace as the Jew, the cross having proved that all sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is now no difference any more in sinners than in indiscriminate grace. Salvation is preached to them both alike.

But in the days which strictly the prophecy contemplates, God will own His ancient people again, and never more shall the seed of Israel cease from being a nation before Jehovah for ever. In those days shall the city be built to Jehovah from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse-gate toward the east, shall be holy unto Jehovah; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down, any more for ever. It is the restoration of the people and the land and the city, when Messiah reigns on His own throne of which the reader can find more in Isa. 11, 12, 35, 65, 66; Jer. 3:16-18, Jer. 30, Jer. 32:37-44, Jer. 33; Ezek. 40-48; and in the minor prophets, especially Zech. 12 - 14. Allegory is vain as to all this.

Application of part to gospel times is not denied; for grace now reigns through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord, as then a King shall reign in righteousness. But judgment shall return to righteousness at that epoch, and the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness so as they never do now. All the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah in that day, which it never can be in this day. To the believer now the

principle of the new covenant applies, as far as his soul is concerned. but Israel will enjoy its terms directly and unqualifiedly, when the Branch of righteousness, crown to David, shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land, and all nations are blessed in Him.

The first blessing here specified is that Jehovah not only gives His laws into the mind, but also writes them upon the heart. It is in pointed contrast with the first covenant written on stones. The law as a system was external, and was characterised by an elaborate ritualism, visible and palpable, when anointed priest, Levite, ruler, and ordinary Israelite had his defined place, with meats and drinks and divers washings and carnal ordinances, as well as specific gifts and sacrifices which could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience. The blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, could not do more than sanctify to the purifying of the flesh. The laws were outside the Israelite; they were not written on his heart. Far different is the work of grace now. God gives them into the mind and writes them on the heart of every believer. There is for the Christian a renewing of the mind, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart ‘by the Holy Spirit given to him. The principle of the new covenant is not only verified but in a richer way spiritually than Israel can have by-and-by, whatever their wondrous privileges in the exclusion of Satan and the presence of the Christ, and the whole creation delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God then reigning with Him.

Next, “I will be to them for God, and they shall be to me for people.” As this will be Israel’s portion in that day, so

it is ours now. More yet is ours, because we can say by the Spirit “Abba, Father,” Christ’s Father and our Father, Christ’s God and our God. As before, it will be no longer an imposed ordinance or a possibly vain title of relationship. All now is by His grace made real, intrinsic, and abiding. All the blessing that is involved in what God is to His people is secured, as His people are secured in their due place toward Him. But we can add our Father, though this did not fall within the design of the Epistle to unfold as we find it elsewhere.

Further, “And they shall not teach each his [fellow-] citizen, and each his brother, saying, Know the LORD, because all shall know me from little one unto great of them.” This is another privilege in which we more than anticipate the blessings of Jehovah’s manifested kingdom. The Son of God is come and has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true. And no wonder; for the Christian has eternal life in the Son, as he has also the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, both capacity and power that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. So it will be when the new covenant is established with both the houses of Israel. “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.... They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.” As it is elsewhere written, which also explains it, “All thy children shall be taught of Jehovah; and great shall be the peace of thy children.” Hence it will be no question of teaching, each his fellow-citizen, and each his brother. The salvation which Israel enjoys in that day so illustrates the scripture, that there will be no need of objective knowledge (γνῶσις) for the

ignorant, because all shall have intrinsically possessed conscious knowledge (εἰδήσουσι) from little even to great of them. The universality of the result testifies that God it is who ensures it for under human teaching, however good, we see every degree of proficiency and at best knowledge far from perfect. Compare also Joel 2:28. The Holy Spirit gives understanding and power.

Here too in Christianity we may observe remarkable analogy. It is in addressing the babes (παιδία) of God's family that the apostle John declares "ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written to you, because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth." This is of course true of the "fathers" and "young men" in Christ; but it is said expressly to those who most needed such encouragement, exposed as they were to seducers who boasted of their knowledge and undermined Christ "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:20, 21, 27). Teachers there are, and those that rule or guide, while Christ is on the throne of God; but they should be the first and the most in earnest to maintain the privileges of the simplest believer.

But there is a further and most needed gift of mercy to which God stands pledged in the new covenant. This too the apostle does not fail to cite as now applied to the believer; though to the Israelite it is set in the last place, whereas the Christian enjoys it as a starting-point, as we may see throughout the Acts of the Apostles.

“Because I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins31 I will remember in no wise more” (verse 12). It will be noticed that the words “and their lawlessnesses” disappear. They are not in the Septuagint any more than the original Hebrew, which indeed has also the singular form, where the Greek gives the plural. It would seem that the words in question were inserted from Heb. 10:17, where beyond doubt they occur, but without “their unrighteousnesses.” In any case grace meets the once guilty but now renewed souls, and comforts those who feel and own their sinfulness with the assurance of divine forgiveness.

How different the terms of the first covenant, even when Moses went up on high the second time, and saw not Jehovah’s glory but His goodness pass before him, and heard Him proclaim Jehovah, Jehovah El, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting, etc.! Now it is precisely clearance of conscience, or guilt, that the awakened soul longs for and seeks from God; and what the law could not do, God does in the gospel by virtue of Christ made sin for us. So our Lord spoke and dealt with Zacchaeus, chief publican though he was, and so most offensive in Pharisaic eyes. But the rejected Messiah, the Son of man, came to seek and to save that which is lost. His coming and work of expiation deposit an infinite fund of mercy toward the guilty, which God in the gospel uses to clear and justify all who believe.

“Merciful” here is not mere pity but “propitious.” Undoubtedly unrighteousnesses are hateful in God’s sight and abhorrent to His nature; so too they become to

a soul when born again. For as that which is born of the flesh is flesh, so that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, as our Lord ruled. The old nature does not become new but remains evil and never to be allowed. But a new one is given, which finds not relief only or even pardon but deliverance in the death and resurrection of the Saviour. Here we transcend the terms and ideas of the new covenant which go no farther than God's mercy in remission and remembrance of sin no more at all. This the Christian has, but in a far surpassing mode and measure. For he is entitled, as we know from other scriptures, to know that he died with Christ to sin, as set forth even in his baptism; that he is risen with Christ, and seated in Him in heavenly places. But as this pre-eminently exalted aspect of the believer's present blessing is not in the most distant way couched in the promises of the new covenant, so it nowhere appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews. And this rightly; for the Holy Spirit is therein drawing out the force of the O.T., and at most what was latent in it, rather than going on to the wholly unrevealed fulness alike of Christ as head, of the church as His body, and of our individual Christian standing too.

An important inference is now drawn from a word. "In saying 'new,' he hath antiquated the first [covenant]: now what is being antiquated and growing aged [is] near disappearing" (verse 13). It is in vain therefore for Jews or other men to reason abstractly for the perpetuity of God's law: His word has already decided the question. The prophet Jeremiah declares in the Spirit that Jehovah will make a new covenant, and an everlasting one, with all Israel. This, as is here shown antiquates the first or legal covenant. The new one is

evidently not of man’s will or weakness, but of God’s gracious power working in His people. And those who believe now, whether Jews or Gentiles, anticipate Israel for whom it was made, but to whom it is not yet extended. But it is sure to Israel in due time, for the mouth of Jehovah has said it.

Hence it is added that what is being antiquated (not “decayeth” as in the A.V.) and growing aged is near disappearing. The cross fulfilled and annulled the legal covenant. the destruction of Jerusalem and of its temple was its grave.

29 The Rec. Text has

γὰρ, but the critics

οὖν on ancient authority: so also

τῶν ἱερέων is rightly dropped, and the article before

νόμον.

30 Ibid.

31 A few of the most ancient MSS. and Vv. support this as the true text, many later copies adding “and their lawlessnesses” as in Text. Rec.

Hebrews 9

The apostle proceeds to draw out, in contrast with the principles of the first covenant, that which the prophet declared should take its place, or rather that which is the Christian's portion now that Christ is dead, risen, and ascended. It is the way into the holies now made manifest; the conscience purged by the blood of Christ from dead works to serve the living God; and the eternal inheritance of which they that are called receive the promise.

"The first [covenant] therefore also had ordinances of divine service, and the sanctuary a worldly one. For a tabernacle was formed, the first in which [were] both the candlestick, and the table and the setting forth of the loaves (or, the show-bread), which is called Holy [place]; but after the second veil a tabernacle that is called Holy of holies, having a golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid all round about with gold, in which [were] a golden pot holding the manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded, and the tables of the covenant, and above over it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; of which things one cannot now speak in detail" (verses 1-5).

Ordinances of divine service the first covenant had in abundance, and most instructive; yet the sanctuary was and could not but be a worldly one. For God was not manifested in flesh here below, nor was man received up in glory. The infinite sacrifice for sin had yet to be offered, in which God is glorified, and whereby He can bless the believer to the uttermost, sin being fully judged in the cross. The veil therefore was still unrent,

and the way into the holies neither available nor manifest. As the sanctuary was of the world (verse 6), so the ordinance was carnal (verse 10). All was of the first creation, shadowy and provisional, at best the witness of good things to come, as the tabernacle itself was of testimony, not one thing there of intrinsic excellency or divinely efficacious.

Such is ritualism. Only it is now beyond measure evil for faith and practice: because it is condemned and annulled by the cross of Christ It is despite of the Spirit of grace sent down from heaven; it is the gainsaying of Korah against the true Moses and Aaron — even Christ now on high. The Jewish system had divine sanction till Christ came, accomplished His work, and took His seat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. Ritualism in the Christian congregation is not only ignorance "but contempt, however unwitting, of the gospel as well as of the church, and what is graver still, of Christ's work and priesthood. The grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ is virtually denied, yea, and destroyed by it, so far as falsehood can.

When we come to particulars, the character of the first covenant which we have traced generally is no less evident. Thus attention is here drawn briefly to its two divisions, the Holy place (verse 2), and the Holy of Holies, each severed by a door or veil, as we read for the holiest of all, "after the second veil." Door and veil barred the entrance of man as such. Even the high priest could only enter where the cherubim of glory overshadowed judicially, to put blood on and before the propitiatory, and not without clouds of incense "lest he die." How contrasted with the bold access by faith we have as a settled title into this grace wherein we stand!

For now the veil is rent in twain from top to bottom, ever since Jesus yielded up His spirit on the cross: the unambiguous proof on God's part that the first covenant is ended, the barrier gone, and the way into the holies laid open to faith.

Not that either part of the tabernacle ceases to yield its instruction to faith: whether the outer, wherein were the candlestick, and the table, and the show-bread; or the inner, with golden censer and the ark of the covenant and its significant contents and surroundings. Of these it was not the Spirit's purpose here to speak severally. Their import indeed is not uncertain when viewed in the light of Christ, to whom each and all bore witness. For He in the first was attested as both light in the sevenfold power of the Spirit, and nourishment in administrative fulness as Man and for man. In the second, to say nothing of that which maintained intercession, was the display of God in judgment and sovereign government, with the testimony of executive power to make good His will. Within the ark, underneath the throne where His glory shone, were the memorial of His people's food when passing through the wilderness, the authoritative sign of that power of life and fruit in priestly grace which preserved from judgment, and the tables of the covenant which expressed the rule that menaced transgression with death.

How transcendent the chance when God no longer dwelt in thick darkness — but revealed Himself in Christ, the true Light, having sent Him not only as life but as propitiation for our sins!

The aim of the Holy Spirit, in referring to the first covenant with its ordinances, and especially its

sanctuary, becomes now apparent. It was not to speak in detail of the contents of the tabernacle exterior or interior, however symbolically instructive, but of its distinctive contrast as a whole with Christianity. For this, not the church, is the subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as it abides a primary truth for any soul, Gentile no less than Jewish, without which (held simply, clearly, and intelligently the doctrine of the church is apt to be a danger rather than a blessing, as it surely is in itself instinct with the love and glory of Christ according to the counsels of God and made good by the indwelling Spirit who baptised all into one body. But where there is repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the soul under the gospel becomes the object of that grace reigning through righteousness, which gives the access into this favour wherein we stand, as Rom. 5:2 puts it, or, as in our Epistle, the way into the sanctuary, not the holy place but the holiest also, made manifest.

So characteristic of the gospel is this privilege that we find it since the cross almost everywhere, and claimed for all that now believe as their assured portion, by none so much as by the apostle Paul, set as he was for the defence of the gospel and its minister in all the largeness of its scope. Rom. 5 we have just heard. 2 Cor. 3:18 is no less explicit, contrasting the Christian with Israel who could not gaze even on the reflected glory which shone from Moses' face and required a veil to hide it; whereas we all, beholding the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, are transformed accordingly even as from the Lord the Spirit. Again in Eph. 2:13, 14, 18, "But in Christ Jesus, ye that once were far off are made nigh by (or, in) the blood of Christ; for he is our peace… for

through him we both have the access through one Spirit unto the Father." No less plain and decisive is Col. 1:12, 13: "Giving thanks to the Father, who made us meet for a share of the inheritance of the saints in light, who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." 1 Peter 2:9 declares that God called the Christian Jews "out of darkness into his marvellous light even as Christ wrought, who suffered for sins once, that He might bring us to God. Nor is 1 John 1:7 less to the point, where he lays down that, as walking in darkness is the status of those who falsely profess Christ and do not practise the truth, we (Christians) walk in the light as God is in the light, have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin. No doubt he says "if "; but this condition is simply if we are real, not nominal merely, in following Christ, and so not walking in darkness but having the light of life (John 8:12).

"Now these things having been thus formed, the priests enter continually into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the services: but into the second the high priest alone once in the year, not without blood, which he offereth for himself and the errors of the people, the Holy Spirit this signifying that the way of (or into) the holies hath not yet been made manifest, while the first tabernacle had Yet a standing the which [is] a parable for the present time according to which32 are offered both gifts and sacrifices, unable as to conscience to perfect the worshipper, [being] only with meats and drinks and divers washings, ordinances of flesh imposed till time of setting right" (verses 6-10).

It will be noticed that it is the present, which the Vulgate and the A.V. alike neglected, though Beza rendered it correctly; yet the present not historical but ethic; for the tabernacle in the wilderness is before the writer, not the temple: so we saw in Heb. 3, 4, and so it is here and throughout. This is evident in the early verses of the chapter, summed up in “these things having been thus formed” or prepared, not only the tabernacle but its furniture; which differed in some essential respects from the temple, for it was the figure of the millennial kingdom and rest, as the tabernacle is of the resources of grace in Christ for the wilderness and its pilgrimage. Hence the ark when set in the temple had neither the golden pot with manna therein nor Aaron’s rod that budded (2 Chron. 5:10), which we find carefully named in verse 4. With such wisdom markedly divine was the scripture inspired in the O.T. as in the N.T.

Nevertheless the law, whatever shadows of heavenly things it afforded, made nothing perfect. And this is demonstrated here by the fact that the priests in their continual entrance go no farther than the first tabernacle or holy place; into the holiest only the high. priest once in the year, and then not apart from blood which he offers for himself and the errors of the people. How far from the gospel which goes out to the ungodly and lost, reconciling to God all that believe in the virtue of the death of His Son!

When Christ came, God was in Him reconciling the world to Himself; but Him both Jew and Gentile rejected and crucified. Under the law God did not reveal Himself, but barred even His people absolutely from His presence; for how could God, if He were dealing with

them on the ground of their conduct, make them free of His presence? He dwelt in the thick darkness, and allowed the priests to approach no nearer than the holy place, the high priest alone (type of Christ) entering the holiest but once a year, and then (for he was but a type, and in fact a sinful man) with blood to offer for himself and the people's sins of ignorance. The barrier was still maintained. But now, and only by the death of Christ, is the veil rent; and the Holy Spirit signifies thereby that the way into the holy places has been and is manifested. It was the death-knell of Judaism, but the foundation of better and heavenly blessing; and as man is put to shame in it, having no part but sins, God is glorified and can thereby work freely in sovereign grace to save alike Jew and Gentile. This is precisely what He is now carrying out in the gospel.

Thus the incarnation was God come to man in Christ; but by the cross man who believes is brought to God, and the way into the holiest in now manifested. In the incarnate Word was divine love and absolute obedience; but the work of atonement was solely in His death. For God was not before glorified as to evil, nor was sin judged to the full, nor consequently the righteous basis laid so that God could be just in justifying the believer: to say nothing of what was of the nearest interest to Himself the Father, raising Christ from the dead and setting Him, the glorified Man, at His own right hand on high, Head over all things to the church which is His body. Hence the notion that the Incarnation was the reconstitution of humanity is a fable opposed to and destructive of the truth: hence no less available to the rationalist than to the ritualist. For it is the alleged ground of blessing without Christ's sacrifice, or God's

righteousness, or sin's judgment, or the triumph of grace over evil and Satan in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Saviour. But it is His death which Scripture reveals as the true groundwork of redemption, though no doubt the glory of His person, true God and perfect man, gave Him the competency, not only to redeem sinners, but to be the Head of the new creation and indeed over all things. Only as raised from the dead and exalted in the heavenly places, is He appointed Head over all things (Eph. 1; Phil. 2; Heb. 1, 2); and this, because, sin having ruined both the heirs and the inheritance, there could be no vindication of God, no adequate and everlasting deliverance for man, without the suffering of death (Heb. 2). It is only thus He became the efficacious centre (John 12:24, 32). He is Son of God, and Son of man.. but all true faith stops not short of His death: else (whatever the motive) it would make light of sin and of the judgment. of God. Compare John 6:35 with 53-56, etc.; 1 John 5:6.

So here we see (verses 8, 9) that, under the law, as the way into the holiest was not manifested, so its gifts and sacrifices could not make the worshipper perfect as to conscience. Now the work, and nothing short of the work, of Christ meets both God and the worshipper, nay the darkest and most distant and defiled of sinners. "Such (or, these things) were some of you; but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by (ἐν) the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6). The provisions of the law, however admirable as a witness of man's sinfulness and of a coming Redeemer, were but superficial and temporal, conditioned only by "meats and drinks and divers washings" of an external sort; and consistently they

touched no deeper wants than “the errors of the people” (verse 7). They were, as here, styled “ordinances of flesh imposed till a time of rectifying.”

Thus the Holy Spirit pronounces the Levitical institutions, however instructive in their season, essentially provisional and temporary, adapted to man in his weakness, ignorance, and probation. Christ is the intervention of God in man, yet God’s own Son revealing Himself and saving the lost. As John puts it, the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. Nor was it word only, even if this were, as it really is, God’s word. God has wrought in Christ. Instead of responsible man, tried in every way, and proved failing and guilty in all, we see now by faith the Second man in heaven set down on the right hand of the throne, sin judged in a perfect sacrifice, death vanquished, Satan’s power annulled, God glorified, and the way into the holiest now manifested, to the present blessedness of every believer here below. And these are and are declared to be everlasting realities, in contrast with Israel’s natural and transient privileges in the past, and before the day when they too, repentant and renewed, enter by divine mercy into their portion, even Messiah and the new covenant, which shall never pass away.

“But Christ having come high. priest of the good things to come,33 by the better and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), nor yet by blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, entered once for all into the holies, having found an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and a heifer’s ashes sprinkling those that are defiled sanctifieth unto the cleanliness of the flesh, how much

more shall the blood of the Christ, who by an eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God, cleanse your34 [or our] conscience from dead works to serve a living God (verses 11-14)!

The great, sure, and plain basis of the Epistle is Christ, not reigning yet as Son of David, but arrived at His actual heavenly position. He is High Priest not here below but in the heavenly places. It is no longer a figure in the hand of mortal man on earth, but God's work of everlasting efficacy in His Son, yet man risen and ascended, by virtue of an atonement, the perfection of which God thus attested, as well as the glory of His person who suffered to the utmost in achieving it; for sin could only thus be absolutely judged and Satan triumphed over by such a sacrifice. Yet while the blessing is fully made known to the believer now, in order to place him in immediate access to God according to the rights of Christ's glory and of redemption actually accomplished for the soul, the phraseology is purposely such as to hold out and ensure "the coming good things" for His people another day, like "the world to come" in Heb. 2, "the rest that remaineth for the people of God" in Heb. 4, "the age to come" in Heb. 6, and the implied exercise of the Melchizedek priesthood in Heb. 7, to say no more now. They were familiar as promised in the O.T. For the Christian the direct aim is to place him through Christ in present, known, and settled relationship with God in the holiest above.

Accordingly the text runs "by the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not hand-made, that is, not of this creation." We may make allowance for the difficulty of presenting the force of both this clause. and the preceding one in Latin, which wants the definite article

— but Tyndale, Cranmer, the Geneva, and the Authorised ought to have adhered to the sense. The Rhemish, singular to say, has “the” good things to come, but “a” more ample and more perfect tabernacle: why they should have thus halted, it is hard to conceive. “The” greater and more perfect tabernacle is in contrast with the earthly one reared by human hands. High priest and sanctuary are in exact keeping. Christianity is “not of this creation” but divine and heavenly, though for believers here below; as Judaism could not rise above sinful dying man and the earth, whatever its solemn sanction or its rigid separateness. Hence it perfected nothing and could satisfy neither. God when He revealed Himself, nor man when the depth of his need on the one hand and the resources of grace on the other were fully made known. “Due time,” or “season of rectification,” came when Christ., rejected of man, became by His blood-shedding the ground of God’s righteousness. who thereby and forthwith proceeds to justify the believer through faith of Him. And this is here stated in terms of the Epistle to the Roman saints, that the thorough identity of the truth with that set before the Hebrew confessors may be shown without argument.

There is a curious erratum (almost certainly the printer’s) in the middle of Tyndale’s version of verse 12: “we” entered, for “he,” as it unquestionably should be. The error involves the deplorable connection of our having “founde eternall redemcion,” an idea as remote as possible from that faithful translator’s mind. Of course no ancient reading, or version, led to it, but a mere slip of typography overlooked in revision of the proof.

The “blood of goats and calves” was a grave object-lesson for Israel in the days when God condescended to deal with the ignorant and erring by the law and a worldly sanctuary and earthly rites and a high priest compassed with infirmity like the people. Now they slight the grace and truth which came ‘by Jesus Christ, and are pronounced, fruit as well as root and branch, the weak and beggarly elements to which some bearing Christ’s name desire to be in bondage Now the entire system is unbelief and ignorance of Christ who “by his own blood” entered once for all into the holies, having found eternal redemption (verse 12). “For us” is the gratuitous addition of the Geneva Version, followed by the Authorised. Abstractly the statement is no more than is in substance taught elsewhere, notably and yet more forcibly in Heb. 10 of this Epistle. But here it is not only uncalled for as not so written, but improper as going beyond the actual aim of the Holy Ghost who is setting out the intrinsic value of the infinite sacrifice, not its application to any, which follows in its own due time and place.

It may be added that there is no good reason here to give the preposition translated “by” the mere local (10) or instrumental (12) notion of “through,” though capable of either when contextually required. But διὰ may and does when needed express the circumstantial condition, as in Rom. 2:27, and elsewhere. So it is best understood here. Into the holies (the veil being now rent) He entered once for all. There He abides without change or the need of repetition, indeed contrasted with any such thing; and His own blood was not for Himself, as if He required any sacrificial means of entrance: therewith it was an eternal redemption He found.

There had been of old a provisional value attached to the Levitical offerings. “The blood of goats and bulls,” on the day of atonement, etc., had an impressive significance; so had a heifer’s ashes sprinkling those that had been defiled in the wilderness (Num. 19). But if these things sanctified “unto the cleanness of the flesh,” how much more shall the blood of the Christ cleanse your [or, our] conscience from dead works (as all the acts of a sinful nature must be) to serve religiously (λατρεύειν) a living God? Only consider the Christ, glorious in Himself, in the character of His offering, “who by an eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless to God.” As He stands alone, so does that offering. of Himself and the Holy Spirit’s part in it is marked here as “an Eternal Spirit”: so does eternity characterise this Epistle, and so was the Christ as ever dependent on God thus, while offering Himself up without spot to bear our sins. For here it is the previous act: not ἀνήνεγκεν but προσήνεγκεν. Compare verse 28, where both occur and in their due relation of course.

Here the Holy Spirit reverts to Christ’s mediation, but avails Himself also of the revelation of inheritance in the close of verse 15 to introduce what was familiar to all, the allusion to a testamentary disposition or will, inasmuch as the Greek word for “covenant” had equally the sense of “testament” in ordinary usage. This accordingly serves to illustrate and confirm the all-importance of Christ’s death, as the hinge of present and everlasting blessing from God, alike the end of the old covenant, and the basis of the new, with the added truth that death as a fact is essential to give validity to a will, which has no operation as long as the devisor is alive. Such is the digression by the way in verses 16, 17.

“And on this account he is mediator of a new covenant, that, death having taken place for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, those that are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a testament [is], the testator’s death must be brought in; for a testament [is] valid in case of dead persons, since it is never of force while the testator liveth” (verses 15-17).35 It will be observed, that notwithstanding the doubt cast on the rendering of “testament” in the last two verses by many eminent Christians and able scholars, there need be no hesitation in deciding for this sense, as here the sole tenable one. That “covenant” is meant everywhere else in the N.T. as in the O.T. is clear from contextual requirement. The same reason of the context here excludes “covenant” and demands “testament,” but here only. As there has already been given a general view of the other occurrences throughout the later scriptures, it is not needful to repeat it. Let it suffice, without a shade of disrespect for other commentators, to examine these three verses, with what follows them immediately, and judge if there be not proof, that the meaning in either case is certain from evidence as it were on the spot, ample and convincing for every soul subject to Scripture.

For as to verse 15 there ought never to have been a question that “a new covenant” is the real sense, not only because “new” is beyond controversy a reference to the prophecy of Jeremiah, who speaks of a “covenant” and not a testament, but without going from the same clause, because it has a “mediator.” Now a mediator was familiar to the Hebrews in connection with a “covenant.” Nobody, in any people, place, or age, heard of a

mediator to a “will.” There is the further disproof in the same verse that we hear of “the first covenant,” which furnishes the reason for an explanation of “a new covenant” if there was to be redemption from the guilt and misery under the first. For the first covenant, as we are elsewhere taught, was a ministration of death and condemnation, as the new is of the Spirit and righteousness (2 Cor. 3).

On every ground “testament” would be here out of place, indefensible, and misleading. “Covenant” alone satisfies every condition of the verse. Death (and what a death!) met “the transgressions that were under the first covenant,” and effected a redemption that answered to the glory of His person and the efficacy of His sacrifice. By virtue of His death Jehovah said according to the prophet (as we have it already cited and shall have it again), Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. such is the voice of the new covenant, in contrast with the old which could only claim obedience, and on failure sentences to die. But His death having taken place, so that law’s authority was established to the uttermost, grace could act freely and grant remission of sins, instead of keeping up their remembrance; yea more, it could righteously vindicate God’s forbearance in the past “for redemption of the transgressions” under the then legal condition, with its penalty of death for the offender. Now on the contrary, death having come in, Christ is Mediator of a new covenant, that the called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. All hangs on Christ and His efficacious death; and those that are called pay earnest heed to the glad tidings of God and await the eternal inheritance that is promised. For the blessing comes of faith, that it may be according

to grace: no other way honours Christ to God's glory, or puts man in his true place.

No less determinate is the meaning of what follows in verses 16, 17, the idea of the inheritance naturally suggesting a will, which comes into force by the death of him who made it. The general principle is laid down in the broadest terms — and these can only mean, without strain of known phraseology, a "testament," not a covenant. "For where a testament [is], the testator's death must be brought in; for a testament [is] valid in case of dead persons, since it is never of force while the testator liveth." Now this, which is an axiom and universally applicable to a will, is notoriously untrue of covenants in general; so much so, that it would be hard to point out a single covenant so established among men. For it would assume the necessity of everyone's death who made a covenant to ensure its operation. Who ever heard of such a covenant? Yet the rendering would imply that it is true of any covenant, and of all. Hence to understand "covenant" in these verses has led many from the appropriate sense of "the testator" to substitute for "the covenanter" (here obviously impossible) "the covenanting victim..... that which establishes the covenant," or some equivalent phrase; a sense which appears in no writing sacred or profane, and is easily shown to be ungrammatical, especially as being inconsistent with the middle voice. Quite as great violence is done to ἐπὶ νεκροῖς in verse 17, which cannot, express "over animals slain," but "when men are dead," or the like meaning.

Now our Lord in Luke 22:29 (to say nothing of John 14:27) prepares the way for the technical term here twice given as "testator." There He was in the act of

devising; here it is in its regular form and force, though of course not that exclusively. But no Greek, if he read the sentence simply as it stands in these two verses, would hesitate to take it substantially as given in the A. and R.Vv. It is the equally sure sense of covenant in verse 15, as before also; and no less clearly is covenant understood in verse 18 and expressed in verse 20 (as it should be) and in 10:20. “Testament” here is through neglect of the context, which in every other place of Scripture, save verses 16, 17, needs “covenant.” What has a testament to do with blood-shedding? A hard and fast uniformity has its snares as well as a too great facility of change; both are to be shunned as unfaithful to the written word, which is as profound as it is simple, being God’s word.

From the digression, which avails itself of a testamentary disposal coming into force only after death to bring out the blessing from Christ’s death, we return to the far more usual notion of covenant in the verses which follow. Accordingly “blood” again resumes its place. This of course is quite foreign to the associations of a will, but most familiar to all acquainted with the ancient covenant of the law.

“Whence not even hath the first [covenant] been inaugurated without blood. For every injunction having been spoken according to law by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of the calves and the goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This [is] the blood of the covenant which God enjoined as to you. And the tabernacle too and all the vessels of the ministry he likewise sprinkled with the blood. And almost all things are purified by blood according to the law, and

apart from blood-shedding no remission taketh place" (verses 18-22).

There are here three distinct uses of blood in the Levitical economy, all of them solemn and momentous, the last of them leading the way into the fundamental blessing of the new covenant which the gospel announces to every believer.

1. The first covenant was inaugurated with blood, as we read in Ex. 24. This is not redemption, but in the strongest contrast with it. The type of redemption had been already given (Ex. 12, 14) in the blood of the paschal lamb, followed by the passage of the Red Sea: the blood which sheltered from the judgment of God; and the power which thereon set the people free from their enemies destroyed for ever. But now Israel far from God had accepted to stand on the condition of their own obedience, Ex. 19; and God had spoken those ten words which would put the people to the proof. Here accordingly (Ex. 24) the covenant receives its seal in blood. "And Moses took half of the blood and put it in a bason; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that Jehovah hath spoken will we do and be obedient. And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold, the blood of the covenant which Jehovah hath made with you concerning all these words." It was the old covenant, not the new; the law, not redemption. The blood which, as this Epistle states, was sprinkled on the book and all the people, simply set forth death as the penalty of disobedience. Hence it was in no way propitiatory but penal.

2. Attention is drawn to Moses sprinkling the tabernacle also, and all the vessels of the ministry in like manner with the blood. That this is distinct from the inauguration of the law should be clear, if only from the fact that neither the tabernacle nor the vessels appertaining to it yet existed. There was of necessity this provision against the defilement of the meeting-place with God, and the vessels for service: without the sprinkling of the blood all must have contracted defilement, because a sinful people were concerned, and God was holy. And this was so true that it is added as a fact that with blood almost all things are purified according to the law. Yet it is not stated absolutely, for water was employed in some cases, fire in others; both figurative of death, and the latter in its extreme form as divine judgment. How blessed for us is the gift of grace where judgment was felt in a perfection unknown and impossible elsewhere! “This is be that came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by (ἐν) the water only, but by the water and by the blood.” He expiates as well as purifies, and both by virtue of His death. Out of His pierced side came blood and water.

“And apart from blood-shedding no remission taketh place.” Here we come in type to the grand truth which vindicated God in all His moral being and brings effectual blessing to guilty man if he bow to God. It is not sprinkling with blood here, but shedding of blood without which remission cannot be. It is the efficacy of the blood shed once for all, presented to God, and bringing to man remission: the ground of divine righteousness, when human righteousness had been proved wholly at fault — the righteousness of God unto all, and upon all those that believe, rolling away every

distinction, that God may bless any, as He surely does all that believe.

We come next to most important inferences from the intervention of God in Christ, His death and blood-shedding. The typical institutions of the tabernacle are judged in their true character, as man is. The most solemn and instructive shadows, which confessed sin in man and looked for mercy in God, pointed to but were absorbed in the reality that is already come in Him, who suffered for sins on the cross, and is now risen and entered once for all into the true and heavenly sanctuary, having obtained everlasting redemption.

“[It was] necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ entered not into holy places made with hand, figures of the true, but into heaven itself now to appear before (to be shown to) the face of God for us; nor that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy places year by year with blood of others: else he must have often suffered since [the] world’s foundation. But now once at a consummation of the ages he hath been manifested for putting away of sin by his sacrifice. And inasmuch as it is laid-up for man once to die and after this judgment, so Christ also, having been once offered to bear [the] sins of many, shall a second time appear apart from sin to those that await him for salvation” (verses 23-27).

When God gave Israel under law a tabernacle of witness, it was of necessity, unless He would compromise His holiness, that the need of sacrifice should be everywhere impressed. Not only could not the Israelite approach

God without a burnt-offering, even if he needed no sin-offering, but the earthly copies of the heavenly originals, which Moses saw on high and followed in the construction of the sanctuary and its contents, required purification. Yet the blood of earthly victims was but formal. It could not purge the conscience, only the flesh. Its purification was for a time and of an external character. It was therefore provisional at Lest, and could satisfy neither God nor conscience awakened to see sins in His light. Hence the veil subsisted, which signified that man could not draw near to God. But the death of Christ rent the veil, which signifies that the believer is free and invited to draw near boldly; for instead of his sins, the blood of Christ is before God.

This changes everything, not yet to sight as it will “be when Christ returns in power and glory, but to faith even now and for ever. For the everlasting effect of God’s work in Christ is a cardinal truth in this Epistle, as also is our association with Him on high. Hence there is defilement on that sanctuary as the effect of our connection with it whilst we are passing through the wilderness. Every need is met by the blood of Christ, which purified the sanctuary as completely as it cleanses us from all sin. Whatever sin or Satan could do to sully has been counteracted by sacrifices better than creature ever offered. And Christ entered heaven itself to be presented manifestly to the face of God on our behalf. There He is for us before God in all the efficacy of His work, in all the acceptance of His person. In Him God came out to replace shadows of good things, and alas! realities of evil, by His own work of redemption; and now in Him man is gone within the holiest. “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him” (John

13:31); as our Lord added, “God shall glorify him in himself, and shall glorify him immediately.” This was done, and is true ever since His ascension, instead of being deferred to the day when His world-kingdom shall come, as come it will in due time (Rev. 11:15). Such is our unchanging representative in the presence of God.

Mark also the pointed contrast with Jewish sacrifice in verses 25, 26. Repetition was the inevitable fact even in their weightiest rites, as on the great day of atonement. It is the blessed truth of the gospel that Christ’s one offering is complete and everlasting in its effect for everyone that believes. Indeed the Holy Spirit deigns to show the impossibility of a repeated offering on His part, because. it would also involve His often suffering. Even the feeble believers who crave a fresh work for each fresh failure must resent as intolerable all thought of His suffering again. Anything of repetition in His case is therefore a merely natural and unbelieving sentiment. The essence of the truth of His work is that now once at a consummation of the ages He has been manifested for putting away of sin by His sacrifice.

“In the end of the world” is surely as misleading as unwarrantable. All the older English versions are vague, if not precisely alike. Wiclif and the Rhemish would have done better if they had adhered yet more closely to the Vulgate; though it is pretty clear that Jerome did not understand the sense more than they. The Revisers have rightly given “of the ages.” These ages were the dispensations in which God had been putting to the proof sinful man, who had been tried in every possible way, and failed in each and all. There had been the promises, the law, the prophets, the kings, etc. God had sought fruit; but instead of paying His dues, His

servants had received rebuff, mockery, and murder. Last of all He sent His Son. This gave occasion to a worse iniquity. Not only did men fail in duty, and spurn His envoys in contempt of Himself; they rejected the Christ of God, they turned God in His person out of the world, they crucified Him who was not only their own Messiah but divine love in Him, God in Him reconciling the world, not imputing their trespasses.

On that very cross where man slew the Lord Jesus, God by Him wrought redemption. His love rose above the world's enmity, and now sends the glad tidings of His grace to His enemies: such is the virtue of Christ's sacrifice, that it can bring to God the foulest without spot or stain. Yet so much the more ruinous will it be for those that believe not. Far better to be a heathen that never heard the gospel than to be a christened man neglecting so great salvation. The day will come when the new heavens and new earth will display the reconciling power of Christ's sacrifice, for every trace of sin will then have vanished from the world. And this is the full force of John 1:29, as of our verse 26 also. Yet the gospel meanwhile is the message of God to any and there is no difference of Jew or Greek, for the same Lord of all is rich toward all that call upon Him. The more you hate your sins, the better for your soul if you are at the feet of Jesus. The Holy Spirit in quickening discovers to us our exceeding evil, where previously we may have deceived ourselves and gone on hard or haughty. But through the sacrifice of Christ God can afford and loves to send forgiveness commensurate with His person and work. It is well to judge oneself for one's sins; but God will act according to His own estimate of Christ's death for us.

The last verse is little understood in general. There is a striking contrast between “men” as such and believers. Hence “judgment” is necessarily to be taken as destruction to the false hopes of nature. Compare John 5:22-29, where it will “be apparent that anarthrous or not makes no difference in respect of its unutterable solemnity to the unbeliever. Not to see the opposition between men” as they are now naturally, and “those that await him is to be wholly unintelligent of the context. For it sets the portion of “men,” with death and judgment before them, in the most forcible comparison with those who have Christ once for all offered to bear the sins of many, and about to appear a second time apart from sin to those that await Him for salvation.

It is untrue that believers are all to die. 1 Cor. 15:51 explicitly contradicts it; and 1 Thess. 4, 2 Cor. 5, imply the reverse. “We shall not all sleep.” Equally certain is it that the believer does not come into “judgment” (John 5:24), where also the word is anarthrous, as the meaning indeed requires in both scriptures. The believer shall be manifested, and give account, but come into judgment. of no kind whatever. His resurrection, if he die instead of being alive and changed, is “of life,” not “of judgment” like that of the wicked. So the prayer of Psalm 143:2 expresses far more of truth than these low traditional views which confound men as such with believers, who await the Lord apart from sin for salvation. Christ’s one offering at His first advent was to bear the sins of many, i.e. of the believers. Hence when He comes a second time, He has no more to do with sin, having already been a sacrifice for it; but apart from it He shall appear to those that await Him, solely His own and not mankind indiscriminately, not for judgment. but

for salvation, which is in contrast with it as distinctly as eternal life is in John 5 32 Text. Rec. has ὃν with several later uncials and most cursives, etc., meaning “in which” time; but the critics read JP with A B Dp.m. many cursives, etc., as in the version. In verse 10 the Text. Rec. or even B is unreliable.

33 Some ancient witnesses have already “come,”

γενομένων, which seems a correction to make the phrase exclusively Christian.

34 Some authorities add “and true”; but this appears to be imported from 1 Thess. 1:9, where it is quite appropriate for souls once heathen, while those who had been Jews needed to think of God as “living.” Copyists and Editors are divided between “our” and “your.”

35 There is no need in Hellenistic Greek to make the last clause a question, as Bengel, Lachmann, and Delitzsch; still less should one misconstrue the adverb like the Vulgate, Erasmus, Luther, Cranmer, the Genevese, and the Rhemish versions.

Hebrews 10

The grand distinction between the legal economy and Christianity was set forth luminously in Heb. 9, with the facts which made the contrast clear, and above all His person, work, and place who closed the one and introduced the other. In the first half of Heb. 10 we have the truth triumphantly applied to the conscience in order to our enjoying the presence of God where Christ is gone.

“For the law, having a shadow of the coming good things, not the image itself of the things, with the same sacrifices which year by year they offer in perpetuity, can never perfect those that approach: else would they not have ceased being offered, because that those who serve, having been once purified, would have no more conscience of sins? But in them [is] a recalling to mind of sins year by year; for [it is] impossible that blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (verses 1-4).

The law had a shadow, and but a shadow, of the coming good things, not the very image. There is even contrast in what is most characteristic. The law made nothing perfect. The work of Christ as now made known perfects the believer, not of course in his state or conduct, but in his standing before God. It was never so under the law. People or individuals, all they got was temporary relief. Finality they had none. They had to offer the same sacrifices: the greatest year by year, the lesser as need arose from day to day, they had to offer without a break. It was only provisional, at best a witness of good to come. But now in Christ and His work the best is come. The Second man is the Last Adam. None shall rival, still

less supersede, Him; and the efficacy of His work is in keeping with the perfection of His person. The constant repetition of the old sacrifices tells the tale of their intrinsic shortcomings. Christ's own sacrifice bespeaks its everlasting worth. Of old, sins if renewed as they were demanded a fresh offering. Where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin; and this is only and precisely true, now that Christ has been once offered. He obtained eternal redemption: for it the believer does not, like Israel, await the day of His appearing. While He is still on high, the Holy Spirit is sent down and he that believes the gospel, purified in his conscience before Him, beholds Him on the right hand of God. No need for Him to offer Himself again; else must He often suffer. But this were an insult alike to Christ and to God, to the Spirit intolerable. Where faith is, God sees not the believer's sins but the blood which blots them out for ever. There is no renewal, because he has been once purified and has no more any conscience of sins.

But men in Christendom have so receded from the gospel of salvation to a mingled system of half-law and half-gospel, that we rarely hear this truth proclaimed, or this privilege enjoyed. Even saints on either hand wonder at the sound. Right well they know when awakened that the Spirit wrought by the word and laid their sins heavily on their conscience; and they cried to God in distress of soul, and called on the Lord — surely not in vain. Still their experience has been very like the saints of old, seeking fresh recourse to His blood on every fresh occasion of need. To use the truth before us, they have still a conscience of sins. They believe in Christ, but do not apprehend the efficacy of His work. Of

old it could not be otherwise, for it was not yet accomplished. Even the most evangelical of prophets, as he is called, was not given to say more than “My salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.”

Now in the gospel, God’s salvation is come, His righteousness is revealed (Rom. 1:17); and believers receive the end of their faith, salvation of souls; not yet of bodies, but of souls by a work divinely perfect, which perfects those that approach. How could it be less? God Himself could not add to the perfecting virtue of Christ’s blood. By Christ “all that believe are justified from all things” from which none could be in the law of Moses (Acts 13:29). It will be known better, enjoyed fully, by the saints in heaven; but God will never estimate it more highly on our account than He declares already to is; and faith now rests on His word. Without Christ’s blood it were impenitent and obdurate presumption to pretend to “no more conscience of sins.” But it puts shame on His work for one who believes on Him to doubt that God beholds him washed in the blood that purifies from every sin. The only true title to believe that any sins are cancelled ought to assure one that all are gone.

How sad it is that those in Christendom who have least pity for the poor guilty Jews are themselves in their faith more Jewish than Christian! Let them test themselves by this capital truth of the gospel. Do they draw near as worshippers once purified having no more conscience of sins? Is this the ground they take in private and in public, in their prayers and in their praises? Do they believe that their guilt is quite gone and for ever by Christ’s sacrifice? Read how the inspiring Spirit lays bare the total failure of the Levitical sacrifices, “In them

is a recalling to mind of sins year by year"; and the reason is no less evident, "for it is not possible that blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." Christ's work is God's intervention to do away with the believer's guilt. This He has done once and for ever. Every wrong deed, word, or feeling calls for humiliation on the Christian's part, as other scriptures show; but no scripture enfeebles the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for him that believes. To doubt it is a sin which exposes to other and all sins; as it may end in total ruin and prove that the doubter never was born of God.

Intrinsic and everlasting value there was not nor could be in those creature sacrifices, which, far from purging guilt effectually, testified by their necessary repetition that the sins were still there and ever coming into remembrance before God. But He had in His purpose a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they yea, in the midst of the Levitical system He had expressed His dissatisfaction with what fell so short of His own nature and of His people's need. All really depended on One to come, not the first man but the Second. Both are plainly taught in the next citation.

"Wherefore, when he entereth into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt-offerings and [sacrifices] for sin thou tookest no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I am come, in heading (or chapter) of a book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God" (verses 5-7).

It was His not only to make known but to effectuate the will of God. That which had been set out previously was suited to man's estate then, partial, earthly, and temporary. From the first God had held out the sure

prospect of what was divine and enduring, yet in man and alone perfect for man. This unbelief never saw, because man's will is always opposed to God, dreads His judgment, believes not His grace, and seeks self-satisfaction. But faith looked to Christ and, in the sense of sin and ruin, found rest nowhere else. And when He enters into the world, His eye is single, His whole body full of light, according to Psalm 40. He speaks truth, whatever the cost to Himself; and it cost Him everything. He recognises that His work, itself the most stupendous of sacrifices, must take the place of those that God had provisionally instituted; more than accomplishing each of them, but superseding them all, because perfection only now was found in it. Peace- (or thank-) offerings did not meet God's will any more than oblations or meal offerings: instead of either He prepared a body for His Son, the Messiah. This exactly suits the revealed facts of the Incarnation. He was to come by the woman, more fully man thus than Adam, but conceived of the Holy Spirit, as was neither Adam nor any other: so truly did God fit a body for the Son, that even in human nature He alone should be the Holy One of God. Nor otherwise would it have suited the Son, either as the constant object of the Father's delight all through the days of His flesh, as the adequate vessel of the Holy Spirit's power in service, or as the sin-offering at last. How different from us, who even when born of God are anointed only as under the efficacy of His blood! His body was the temple of God without blood.

Dr. Randolph, unless memory fail me, in his elaborate examination of quotations from the O.T. in the N.T. gives up the attempt to account for the chance in the LXX. from the Hebrew form of the last clause in verse 5; and

so does the late Dean Alford “leave the difficulty an unsolved one.” There is no sufficient reason to suppose a misreading gave rise to that Greek version, with Abp. Ussher (vii. 517) followed by Ernesti, Michaelis, Semler, etc., down to Bleek in our day. That the Epistle to the Hebrews adopts it, not as the literal rendering but as the substantial sense, is of deep instruction and interest; and this has commended itself to the most reverent and competent readers to the present time. The allusion is neither to Ex. 21:6, nor to Isa. 1. 5: Psalm 40:6 (7) is distinct from both, though all three centre in Messiah.

For (1) the Holy Spirit in the Psalm refers to the assumption of human nature in a condition wholly different from fallen man, even from His virgin mother. Of this the figure of “ears digged” not merely opened or bored, is the striking expression. Other ears were deaf through sin; His only God dug for Him, as He only ever heard and obeyed, living thus “not by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” “A body didst thou prepare for me” well answered to that, and gives the meaning which all might not so easily draw from the Hebrew phrase. (2) Then comes the application of the prophet who speaks of the Messiah morning by morning wakened to hear. “The Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear.” It is not alone holy humanity given Him at the outset, but His habit of daily dependence as “the Servant.” (3) The type in the law completes the case; for this conveys that at the end of faithful service, when He might have gone out free, He (in love to His master, His wife, and His children) submits to have His ear “bored” through with an awl, as the sign of serving for ever. It is His death for the glory of God, and the life and blessing of all that believe. Thus

consistency marks all, while each is distinct; and our text refers to the divine preparation of a body for Messiah, suited for His worthy work.

“In whole burnt-offerings and [sacrifices] for sin thou tookest no pleasure.” The last words are still the energetic rendering of the Septuagint, not an exact reflection of the Hebrew, Thou didst not ask. Men easily satisfied themselves and trusted that God was satisfied with offerings of free will when they prospered, and no flagrant evil required sacrifices for sin. But God ever looked on for His will to be done — what is quite impossible to the first man fallen as he is, and far above him even when unfallen. For this appeared the One who was alike Son of God and Son of man according to what was written in a roll familiar to the Father and the Son. It was a purpose indeed before man or the world existed, the fruit of which will abide in the new heaven and new earth, when time melts into eternity for weal and woe.

“Then said I, Lo, I am come (in heading of a book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God” (verse 7).

Such was the place Christ took here below. Adam surrounded by all that was very good, failed utterly even when tried by the slenderest test. The race had not even the wish nor yet the notion. Self-will characterised all nations, most strongly (perhaps it is that we know them best) Greeks and Latins. All sinned, these boldly: nothing more preposterous in the eyes of either than to give up one’s own will to do only God’s. And what can we say of English, French, Germans, etc., since Christ marked out that sole path of perfectness for man here below? Ah, the Second man is also the Last Adam. Not

that many, many thousands have not followed His steps in faith and love by Him who strengthened and directed them but how feebly and afar off, even those nearest? For, as was the glory of His person, such was His devotedness,, whatever the trial. Though He was Son, yet learned He obedience (previously and absolutely new to Him as truly divine) by the things which He suffered. Being in the form of God He counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondman, made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, death of the cross. Others had done miracles, to His own He promised works greater than even He had done, because He went to the Father; but what man ever obeyed as He? Who, even as a saint, could say like Him that he had never done his own will? He, and He only, was entitled to say, “Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God.”

As the person was most glorious, and the body fitted as only God could fit by a miracle of holy character and power, we shall find that the end was worthy of that wondrous path, whereon the Spirit of God descended as a dove and came upon Him, and the Father’s voice out of the heavens at length saw meet to break His hitherto ineffable silence with the words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I found my good pleasure.” Freely He had come to glorify His Father; but when He is come, He keeps the position of man unswervingly to do the will of God.

Attention is drawn to the wondrous fact in the unseen realm, disclosed of old,, now set before us with emphasis, where the Son proffers Himself at all cost to

effect, for God's glory and for man's blessing, what was wholly beyond the creature. Thus only could purpose and obedience meet in Him who deigned to take manhood, save the fallen by the sacrifice of Himself, and glorify God in all respects. "Saying above, sacrifice and offering and whole burnt-offering and sacrifice for sin thou wouldest not, neither tookest pleasure in (such as are offered according to law), then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first that he may establish the second; by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth day by day ministering and offering often the same sacrifices, such as can never take away sins. But he, when he offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down continuously at God's right hand, henceforth waiting till his enemies be set as a footstool of his feet. For by one offering hath he perfected continuously the sanctified" (verses 8-14).

Even in the O.T. enough was said to intimate the divine estimate of the sacrificial system. It kept up the wholesome acknowledgment of man's need and guilt. The remembrance of sins never actually effaced the witness of God ready to accept it, but in creature offerings altogether inadequate. It pointed to One who, in the body prepared for Him alone, could and would do the will of God, not an angel but man though infinitely more. Law was wholly unavailing to glorify God on the one hand, and to deliver man on the other. Only the Son of God could do both; and He on this account becoming not only man, the woman's Seed, but in grace obedient up to death (which had otherwise no claim whatever on Him), a sacrificial death for sin not His own in the least decree but ours solely; and this after a life of

unswerving faithfulness and absolute devotion to His Father's will and glory in a world of sin, sorrow, suffering, and death.

Verse 8 sums up the result in a few pregnant words: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." The sacrifice of Christ was alike the consummation and the close of the Levitical economy. It was no longer requirement of man, but God's will done perfectly; so that He could in virtue of it bless weak, failing, guilty man, if he believed, according to all the love of His heart. For this He had waited — O how long! God's will was now done. How different from the will of man in pride or vanity, in violence or corruption, as the race had done since Adam! This wrought curse and ruin; that, blessing without measure or end, and worthily. For, having done the will of God in a life of goodness, He suffered notably throughout life but above all in His death, as from man for God, so from God for man at last crowning all, when for us made sin that we who believe might become God's righteousness in Him. Between the Father and the Son it was settled ere man or time began; in due time, when all was moral wreck and man had failed under all circumstances, after every trial on God's part among the chosen people as outside them, He became man to do it, and He did it at all cost to perfection, glorifying God withal in that sacrifice of Himself which was to abolish sin for ever.

The highest angel is but a servant; the Son became one. This very fact implies His personal glory as true God. For the archangel could neither empty himself of the glory God gave without sinning against the God who gave him his position; nor did he need to humble himself in becoming a servant, for this he was and could be

nothing else. But a divine person could and did. As written elsewhere, He emptied Himself, having taken a bondman's form, being come in likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient up to death, yea death of the cross. To the Christian the religion of signs is for ever gone. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Thus did He establish God's will, "by (

ἐν) which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all" (verse 10). Once God set apart Israel to Himself after a fleshly sort, which involved. in it nothing spiritual, though the figure of the mortification of the flesh. Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles previously, have been and are set apart through that body offered up once for all; and it is in virtue of God's will by means of Jesus offered up that we are thus sanctified. Men as such have 'been, and been proved, utterly sinful. Later in the Epistle (Heb. 12:14) we are exhorted to practical holiness, the holiness apart from which none shall see the Lord. But here it is a divine operation already accomplished in the Christian, the effect of which abides; for it is once for all, like that offering which supersedes all others and can never be repeated. God rests in all its completeness and perfection, and sanctifies us accordingly as a settled permanent state. Theology does not accept or confess this great boon, any more than the Spirit's sanctification of every saint in a new life given as in 1 Peter 1:2; both distinct from, and the grand basis of, that holiness in practice which ought to be progressive, and on which the Lord insists as here in Heb. 12:14.

But there is yet more, which calls for a further contrast with Judaism. “And every priest standeth day by day ministering, and offering often the same sacrifices, such as can never take away sins: — but he, when he offered one sacrifice for sins, continuously sat down at God’s right hand, henceforth waiting till his enemies be set as a footstool of his feet. For by one offering hath he perfected continuously the sanctified” (verses 11-14). The immeasurable superiority of Christ’s sacrifice is here demonstrated in the clearest way. The Jewish priest “standeth,” being necessarily called to constant readiness of service day by day, and offering often the same sacrifices, because they were intrinsically ineffectual and needed habitual repetition. Not so the Saviour: His one sacrifice for sins is so efficacious that He took His seat in perpetuity at God’s right hand. “It is finished.” The will of God as to this is done. Christ offered up Himself, God has accepted it, the believer is perfectly blessed thereby. It is once for all, and attested by His unbroken sitting at God’s right hand, whence He will rise by-and-by to execute judgment when God gives the word to deal with His enemies. There meanwhile He sits, having done and suffered all for His friends, once His foes but now believing in Him. And the reason assigned for His continuous seat there is full of blessing for us: “For by one offering hath he perfected continuously the sanctified.”36 It is not enough then to assure the Christian that he has been sanctified or set apart by Christ’s effectual offering once for all, though this surely is immense in itself. By the same one offering has He perfected in perpetuity the sanctified. But εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς is not the same as ἅπαξ or ἐφάπαξ, as M. Stuart says. “Once” or “once for all” might have been joined with προσενέγκας θυσίαν, but not “in perpetuity”

which demands to go with ἐκάθισεν, “sat down.” There the sense fully applies; whereas by the loose rendering “for ever,” followed by a comma as in the Auth. and Rev. versions, the true force is lost, and help given to the falsehood of a mass going on for ever, though this would require προσφέρων to make it accurate. Perfected Himself as risen and glorified, He has perfected those set apart to God. Both the perfecting here and the sanctification in verse 10 are completed actions, the effect of which does not pass away. They err who teach that either is a process going on. Both are blessed effects of Christ’s offering, to which nothing can be added for their end. Nor is this at all weakened, as some argue, from the form of “the sanctified” in verse 14; because this expresses the class in an abstract way, not at all as to time: if it did, it would contradict the form of the statement in verse 10, which does express time, and declares that we enjoy the settled result of God’s having thus set us apart. Such a contradiction is not, and could not be, in the inspired word. Our bodies of course await the glorious change at Christ’s coming again. Meanwhile we ourselves, our souls, are perfected without a break through the work Christ has done for us. The Father and the Son could do no more for our sins than is already accomplished in the sacrifice of Jesus, and revealed to our faith in the written word. There is growth, there ought to be advance, and there may be declension, in holiness; but this is not the question here, which treats of the Christian standing through Christ’s offering. And this admits of no degrees. It is always perfect for every believer. But practical holiness is quite another thing, but imperfect even in the most pious, and ought to progress. This is not the question or sense in the context.

We have had the will of God as the source of our salvation, and the Saviour's work as the efficacious means. There now follows the no less indispensable witness of the Holy Spirit as the unfailing power of bringing our souls into the possession and knowledge of the blessing. Thus each person of the Godhead has His appropriate place, and all contribute to this end as worthy of God as it is needed by man.

"And the Holy Spirit also beareth witness to us; for after he hath said, This [is] the covenant which I will covenant with them after those days, saith Jehovah. Giving my laws, on their hearts and on their mind I will write them: and their sins and their lawlessnesses I will remember no more. Now where remission of these is, [there is] no more an offering for sin" (verses 15-18).

The dignity of Him who testifies is an essential part of the boon conferred on the Christian. None less than a divine person was in accordance with the purpose of God or the accomplisher of His work, His own Son, for whom, with whatever imperfect light, all saints had waited from the first. Now that His will was done by Christ to the glory of the Father, a competent and suited witness was requisite; and this was no other than the Holy Spirit who ever cave energy, to what God took in hand. Nor was it less imperative if we were to receive and to enjoy that certainty of acceptance with God which is essential to Christian communion, worship, and walk. Faith had ever been the condition of all that pleased God in men now that Christ is in heaven it has a pre-eminent value. "We walk by faith, not by sight." But faith is only another way of expressing divine certainty in us. It receives on His word what He reveals. And He who came to glorify God by His death on earth is now

glorified by and in God in heaven to make heavenly those who behold Him there.

It is interesting also to observe how carefully Scripture avoids the error of assuming that the new covenant expresses our standing. The blood of it is shed; the spiritual blessedness of it is ours who believe. But its strict and full import awaits the house of Israel and the house of Judah at a future day, as we saw in Heb. 8. Then all its terms will be verified.; not only what the heart needs and the mind, with full pardon its principle, though the Jews have not yet bowed to the Messiah. But as His work is done and accepted, so the Spirit attests the full remission of sins in His name: God will remember them no more for those that believe. And where this remission is, there is no more an offering for sin. Such is Christianity in contrast with Judaism. It is founded on Christ's sacrifice, which has so completely taken away the sins of believers that no offering for them remains.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness for entering into the holies by the blood of Jesus, a recent and living way which he dedicated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh; and [having] a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from a wicked conscience, and our body washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering for he is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another for provoking unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, even as [is] customary for some, but encouraging, and so much the more as ye see the day drawing near" (verses 19-25).

But Christ's work avails much more. It gives present entrance into the holies. What took away our sins rent the veil; and those who believe are invited and free of the innermost sanctuary even now. Boldness to enter there on any pretension of our love or holiness, of new nature or even divine ordinance, would be mere and shameless presumption. Here it is calmly claimed for Christians, who are exhorted in the strongest terms to approach by faith to God's presence without a doubt or a cloud, now that their sins are gone. Boldness to enter there is due to the blood of Jesus. Only unbelief hinders. It is a new and living way which He dedicated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. We honour Him by using it in the fullest confidence that it pleases God.

Nor this only: we have a great Priest over the house of God. His is the title. He is Son over God's house, which even Moses was not but only a servant in it: and His house are we if we hold fast our boldness instead of doubting or giving it up. In heaven itself Christ now appears before the face of God for us, who through His sacrifice have no more conscience of sins, as He there is the proof that we are perfected unbrokenly. He is above to maintain us, spite of our weakness and exposure here, according to the cleansing of His blood and the nearness it confers on those who believe.

Hence we are told to "approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Never could we deserve such a privilege. His glory and His work alone entitle us, but they do so completely; and we honour Him and appreciate the grace of God by approaching not with fear or hesitation but with a true heart in full assurance of faith. God Himself has wrought by His Son and in the Spirit, that we might be fully blessed even here and

enjoy already this access to Himself in the sanctuary. What an indignity tradition puts on every person of the Godhead alike, on the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, when it drags souls back to the dread and distance of Judaism! For there is no humility so genuine as that which is the fruit of faith, sees itself so unworthy as to deserve only condemnation, and bows in everlasting gratitude to God and the Lamb, whom the Holy Spirit teaches us to be worth all our thoughts and affections, our worship and service.

The figures employed are drawn from Levitical institutions, but express a settled condition which far transcends what could be then: “having our hearts sprinkled from a wicked conscience, and our body washed with pure water.” The sons of Aaron outwardly were washed and sprinkled for priestly service. Elsewhere we find provision for failure, as in John 13 and 1 John 2:1; here we have only the fundamental ground which abides, as is indeed expressed by “washed” or bathed, in John 13:10. This it was the more necessary to insist on, as in an epistle for those who had been Jews ever used to failure and provision for it, to whom the new and living way was unknown with its eternal and fullest blessings. And now souls in Christendom need to be weaned from those Jewish elements to which they have been so long in bondage. Even Christians generally need the truth of the gospel to deliver them from human thoughts and ways. When they are established in grace, other wants claim their place, where there is much to learn.

Again the word is, “Let us hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering,” that is, firm and stedfast, not through our strength or courage, but “for faithful is he

that promised." Power of continuance is in looking to and for Christ. In the A.V. of verse 23 "faith" is a strange if not unaccountable mistake. "Hope" is here right as "faith" in verse 22. Promise connects with the future, and hence calls for hope.

Then comes the call to "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works." When set right before God as to the present and the future, we are in a condition and are exhorted to seek the good one of another. And, in order to promote the affection and deeds worthy of Christians, it is important to hear the caution, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is customary for some, but encouraging." For this is well, rather than an objurgatory tone which provokes neither to love nor to good works. Our gathering together is of great moment: none can neglect it without snare and loss. And we need mutual cheer in the midst of difficulties, sorrows, and dangers. Isolation may be a resource in special circumstances; but it is never to be desired like fellowship as the rule.

As responsibility is here in view, it is "the day" or appearing of the Lord that follows, when our fidelity or the lack of it will be manifested. Conscience should be the more in exercise, because of the grace wherein we stand; but flesh would take advantage of grace for carelessness. The assembly has its serious place and claim according to God's word, as well as the soul. Difficulties increase, as the day approaches; but His word is authoritative for such as fear Him, and never misleads where the eye is single. The Holy Spirit effects this by directing us to Christ. Then Scripture tells on the heart as well as on the conscience; the new man answers to the word of the Lord, and lives in obedience.

There follows a most solemn warning, as much in keeping with the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, as that given in Heb. 6 is with the displayed power of the Holy Spirit in honour of His person. To abandon Him or His work is fatal; and such is the question in both warnings, not personal failure or practical inconsistency within or without, however grievous and inexcusable, but apostasy from the power of the Spirit to forms, or from the only efficacious work of the Saviour to indulge in sin wilfully and habitually. Either is to prove oneself the enemy of God's grace and truth, though the two paths may diverge ever so widely. But faith, and the faith, are alike abjured, whether for religious vanities or for reckless unholiness. It is man in both, fallen man preferred, God and His Son rejected, however seemingly far apart as the poles. Both paths of ruin, not without votaries in apostolic days, are at the present crowded and ever increasingly.

"For if we are sinning wilfully after we received the full knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but t certain fearful expectation of judgment and fierceness of fire about to devour the adversaries. If one set at nought Moses' law, he dieth without compassion on [evidence of] two or three witnesses: of how much worse punishment, think ye, shall he be thought deserving that trod down the Son of God, and counted common the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him that said, To me [belongeth] vengeance, I will requite, saith Jehovah; and again, Jehovah will judge his people. A fearful thine, [it is] to fall into a living God's hands" (verses 26-31).

It is a serious consideration to read “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the custom of some is in such proximity to apostasy. But so it is. The habit is not only unworthy of Christians but perilous. It is to neglect, if not to despise, one of the greatest means of edification and comfort. It is indifference to the fellowship of saints. It is independence and slight of His presence who not only loves us but is pleased to be in our midst for blessing ever fresh and growing. Are these privileges of little account in opened eyes and to ears that hear? Then weigh what follows in the light of “the day drawing near,” when motives as well as ways will be laid bare. Little as the beginning seems to some, it is the beginning of a great and possibly fatal evil. “For if we are sinning willingly after we received the full knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins.” Giving up any assemblage which has the Lord’s sanction for ease, or private reasons which are not imperative duty, may embolden many if not all to give up, and so end in callous contempt and fleshly self-indulgence.

It might seem incredible, did we not know as a fact, how many unestablished young get worried by the enemy when they find themselves so far below the standard of Christ, and particularly when through unwatchfulness they have found themselves guilty of sin, But their state is wholly in contrast with the apostate boldness described in this chapter as well as in Heb. 6. There is nothing really in common. The apostate is as self-complacent as haughty toward Christ, and hates the truth the more because he once professed it. The tried and shaken believer condemns himself unsparingly and desires above all things fidelity to Christ. Confidence in

His grace through a fuller sense of His work in judgment of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:1-4), not remission of sins only, is the great remedy so little appreciated generally, as well as His advocacy in case of special failure (1 John 2:1, 2).

The reader should observe that “sinning” in verse 26 is the present participle and does not relate to an act or acts of evil (as in the last text referred to), but to the habitual or continuous habit of the person. And this is strongly pointed out in a Greek Scholiast which Matthaei quotes. It supposes souls not born of God; which is in no way inconsistent with “we” or with having received objective knowledge, however accurate, full, or certain. On the contrary, both here and in 2 Peter 2:20, this is expressly allowed to be Within the range of flesh’s capacity: the lesson which is lost for all that assume like Alford, that this can only be by those who are real possessors of life or spiritual grace.

In the face of such reasoning it is a plain and instructive fact that not a word in any of those scriptures implies that they ever were begotten of God. They were mere professors of Christ, never children of God. Thus they might have had the highest external privileges of the Spirit and powers of the age to come (cf. Matt. 7:21-23), which only aggravated their defection from the Lord, but in no way intimated, as Delitzsch fancied, “a living believing knowledge of it [the truth] which laid hold of a man and fused him into union with itself.” It is a gross error that thus verse 29 becomes unintelligible. Those who speak so only prove how far they themselves were from a sound intelligence of Scripture as to God or man. Another form of misunderstanding appeared of old in the Novatian controversy from misuse of baptism, for which the curious reader may consult of the Greeks

Chrysostom and of the Latins Augustine, as well as later writers, or the still lower because more human school of Theodore of Mopsuestia.

It is clear that, abandoning Christ, they must forfeit sacrifice for sins, His only, being effectual and writing death even on what had pointed to His. There remained therefore for such as renounced Him “a certain expectation of judgment and fierceness (or, heat) of fire about to devour the adversaries,” into which apostates necessarily pass. And this is confirmed from God’s dealings in the past, allowing for the vast superiority of gospel over law. If one set at nought Moses’ law and dies apart from compassionate feelings, in case of two or three witnesses, how much worse punishment, think ye, shall he deserve that trampled down the Son of God, and counted common the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, and insulted the Spirit of grace? One cannot conceive thoughts or words more energetic, and a doom implied more awful. And so it must be: for a blessing spurned, after being received on the fullest proof and the surest attestation, becomes the measure of the guilt of abjuring it. As in verse 26 we saw the eagerness of some to infer the defectibility of grace and the denial of eternal life, so here we have to face the straits of pious men trembling for the truth sacred and dear to their hearts, and conceiving strange evasions, instead of trusting absolutely God’s word. Thus Dr. John Lightfoot, followed by Guyse, etc., argues that Christ was sanctified by blood! (verse 29) as others refer the sanctification in question to the covenant! Here again the contending parties overlook that the Epistle to the Hebrews contemplates, as does 1 Corinthians, Christian profession; which ought to be real by divine grace, but

may be only external and thus admits of a "sanctification" not necessarily inward but positional only.

The citation of Deut. 32:35 ought to strike those who question the apostle's hand; because it differs from both the Hebrew original and the Sept. version, and is identical with Rom. 12:19.

There evidently had been ground for the extreme warning given us in Heb. 6 also; and of course the danger of apostasy is always real among those who name the Lord's name. Only those who become partakers of divine nature by grace surmount the difficulties and overcome the world through faith. Yet here as before the actually bright side is not forgotten, but enlarged on for the comfort of those who held fast.

"But call to remembrance the earlier days in which, when enlightened, ye endured much conflict of sufferings, partly being made a spectacle by both reproaches and afflictions, and partly also having become partakers with those thus conversant. For ye both sympathised with those in bonds, and accepted with joy the plundering, of your goods, knowing that ye have for yourselves a better substance and abiding. Cast not away therefore your confidence, since it (or, the which) hath great recompense. For of endurance ye have need, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. For yet a very little while he that cometh will be come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. But we have no shrinking back unto perdition, but faith unto soul-winning" (verses 32-39).

Relaxation is ever a danger for soldiers when on service, as Christians always are here below; and those who had been Jews were exposed to it as much at least as Gentile brethren, which we may see for these last in 1 Cor. 4 and 15. The Hebrew believers had begun well; they are here urged to continue enduring the fierce conflict of the enemy. All the old English versions save that of Rheims (1552) narrow their sympathy according to the Text. Rec. to the bonds of him who, now wrote. but the better reading seems to be “the prisoners” i.e. those of the Lord in general. To some of feeble faith this is. no small trial; to others the plunder of their property. These saints had shone in both respects. “In heaven” appears to be a copyist’s addition, as is “in” (ἐν) just before. Still the great guard is against casting away their confidence or boldness of soul, the root within of outward suffering as of service. Patient endurance is needed as ever, of which the love of Christ is the spring, glory with Him the hope alone, the road, where the will of God is for us to do as it was done by Him perfectly. The recompense assured is inseparable from His advent; which here as elsewhere is kept immediately before the Christian.

The application of Habakkuk’s words is modified in accordance with our hope by the same divine Spirit who inspired the prophet. “For the vision is for a time, and it shall shoot forth at the end, and not in vain: though he should tarry, wait for him; for he will surely be come and will not delay.” So runs Hab. 2:3 in the Sept. Christ’s first coming and work give occasion for the beautiful and true modification in our paraphrase, while the prophecy abides in all its undiminished force for those who received Him, and others like them up to the end. For the Christian the known person of Christ shines; He

is all. Death is in no sense our hope, but the coming of the Bridegroom, not the mere fulfilment of the vision. If we depart to be with Him meanwhile, it is far better than remaining here absent from the Lord. Present, or absent, we are still waiting as He is, who will surely come and not tarry. Times and seasons have to do with "the day of the Lord," when execution of divine judgment, comes on the world, not on the dead yet but the quick. "The coming or presence or the Lord," as the hope of the heavenly saints, is altogether independent of the revelation of earthly events, as it is before their accomplishment; and therefore is that hope precisely the same for us now as for those in apostolic times, allowing time for its full revelation by the apostle Paul.

Christendom fell away, though never so much as in the last century and half, into the dream of the church triumphant, not suffering, and of a world-wide victory for the gospel during the Lord's absence. All distinctive truth and heavenly hope are surrendered by an error as stupendous for principle as for practice. For it levels the N.T. to the footing of the O.T., and obscures, where it does not destroy, the characteristic force of both. The result for thoughtful minds, we say not for believers, is an enormous impulse given, both to superstition which in its blindness seeks to amalgamate Judaism and Christianity, and to rationalism which has no faith in the word of God, and no divinely given perception of Christ; who is little to both. Scripture, it is plain, speaks of the gospel of the reign, Christ's reign, which goes out before the end of this age comes, never of the reign of the gospel, the delusion of the worldly-minded.

But the language of the prophet in the verse (4) that follows is also turned to suited and serious use: "If he

should draw back, my soul hath no pleasure in him; but the just one shall live by faith in (of) me." It is plain that in this Epistle the order is adapted to the object in hand, which is not to enforce justification by faith as in Rom. 1:17, nor to set aside the interpolation of the law in opposition to grace as in Gal. 3:11, but to insist on faith as the power of life, and this too practically, as in all else; of which the chapter that follows is the weighty, full and interesting illustration.

If the true reading here is, as it appears to be on adequate authority, "my just (or righteous) one," it is excellent sense" as testifying God's appreciation of the one who walked in faith and righteousness, the godly principle of power. In contrast is his soul which is lifted up," instead of dependent on God and His word. Like Cain, there was no uprightness in him, but evil works and hatred, the end of which is drawing back to perdition nothing more offensive to God. The notion for which Delitzsch rather improperly contended, that "thy righteous one" is the necessary subject of the sorrowful supposition that here follows, is quite unfounded, as ought to have been plain from verse 39 which encourages every believer. Never does the Holy Spirit lead such a one to a doubt; but many a professor does draw back to his ruin.

Thus, if it was natural for Jewish saints when dispirited to look back at their old association of visible splendour, the danger of abandoning all God had now wrought in Christ and given to faith is solemnly applied; and they are called not to cast away their confidence and its great recompense. True, they needed endurance. But let them remember that the end of everlasting joy is at hand; for He that cometh (and it is yet a very little while) will

come and will not delay. What blessed grounds to persevere in faith! They had long walked in Christ's path: a few trials more might be theirs. All above is glorious, and He is coming quickly. Is the saying of the soul even a small thing? And what of joy and blessedness and glory does not follow?

36 It is singular that any believer should fail to see that τοὺς ἁγιαζομένους here must be "the sanctified" as a class apart from time, because the same persons are in ver. 10 declared to be already ἡγιασμένοι. For this means that they were now sanctified, and therefore not a process going on. Both could not be true if ἁγιαζομένους were taken in its temporal usage. But they are both true without doubt all the same where the abstract force of the present is seen, as every scholar ought to know.

Hebrews 11

The close of Heb. 10 leads naturally into the rich unfolding of the power of faith which follows in an order truly remarkable. It was the more in season here, as there had been defection through the absence of it; and its value for God's pleasure as well as man's salvation is evident and undeniable, as had just been pointed out. The Jew was peculiarly exposed to overlook its virtue, surrounded as he was by a ritual which appealed to his sight every day; and the Christian Jew had to watch against his old habit, and needed to learn that the great distinctive principle of blessing now as of old lies in faith. Did he value antiquity? Faith distinguished all whom God honoured from first to last; not the law but faith. "Thy faith hath saved thee," said the Lord; whilst the law is but a ministration of death and condemnation.

Undoubtedly the source of all blessing for sinful man is in the grace of God working by His Son and in the Holy Spirit; as this Epistle shows the ground of it all to be in the glorious person of Jesus our Lord and in His efficacious work of redemption. Still it is by faith that we receive the blessing; and faith is never without repentance to God as its accompaniment, never without love as its fruit, with works and ways suitable and inseparable in the Husbandman's care. It is of God's will, but through faith, that we were begotten by the word; it is of faith that we have been justified; it is by faith that we have had and have access into this grace, the true grace of God, wherein we stand; it is through faith that we are all sons of God, as through faith we received the promise of the Spirit; by grace have we

been saved through faith, as the believer only has eternal life in the Son of God, and boasts in hope of the glory of God. This is far from all that Scripture attaches to faith but how immense is the blessedness even here intimated!

“Now faith is substance (or, confidence) of hoped-for things, conviction of matters not seen. For in virtue of this the elders were testified of. By faith we apprehend that the worlds have been framed by God’s word, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things that appear” (verses 1-3).

Thus is laid down, what every intelligent believer knows to be true experimentally, that faith realises things hoped for, is a demonstration to the soul of matters not seen. It is no new principle, though it shines as all that is morally noble does in Christianity. All of whom the world was not worthy, all who honoured God and looked above the present and the visible, were marked by it. The O.T. as the N.T. is full of its blessing, and the lack of it opens the door to all ruin. As it inspires with present confidence in the future we hope for, so it affords demonstration of matters not seen: we look, according to the word and in the Spirit of God, at the things not seen and eternal. There is not only certainty but present enjoyment.

Some have made a difficulty for themselves by the mistaken assumption that we have here a definition of faith. This is clearly not the object, but rather a description of its power, range, and effect. Faith scripturally in itself is simply believing God, accepting His word because He says it, not on visible evidence or on reasoning but on God’s authority. Now, under the

gospel because of its all-importance, it is receiving the testimony of God which He has testified about His Son (1 John 5:9), believing (not exactly “on,” but) Him that sent the Son (John 5:24); or, as in John 3:32 it is expressed, he that receives His testimony sets to his seal that God is true., while he that does not believe God has the awful guilt of making Him a liar (1 John 5:10).

Before presenting the bright array of believers, the great truth of creation is set out as a question for faith. And so it truly is. Among the heathen all was as confused as the chaos they generally made co-eternal with deity. Yet the fact was once known but got corrupted and lost, notwithstanding the testimony to God’s invisible power and divinity in the things that were made. It might seem a necessary inference that there must be an Almighty Creator; yet who drew it plainly? Nothing but Scripture reveals it simply, suitably, and solemnly; and faith received it of old as now. And it becomes all the more needful to heed it, when the course of this evil age runs strongly toward the darkness of heathen thought, and men find their Bible in science which knows not a single truth of God, being too self-satisfied to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear His word. Yet even the proudest and most hostile of these modern philosophers is constrained to confess, that they can only investigate phenomena, and are absolutely ignorant of the originating power which gave birth to them. Only the mind cannot but own that such there must have been. It is an “unknown God” still, though they are hardly as candid as the Athenians in erecting an altar and inscribing their ignorance. Yet there is no excuse now, where not only the Scripture is read, but the Son of God come has given the amplest proof of the truth.

The inspired statement will reward the closest scrutiny. By faith we apprehend that the worlds have been framed by God's word, and that what is seen has not been originated out of things apparent. This leaves ample room for whatever changes can be adequately shown to have followed the original creation of the earth; while it also maintains that what is seen did not derive its being from what appears. That all was made out of nothing is what no Christian would say; but that, where nothing existed, God created all things out of His own will and word is just the truth alike simple and profound; and all other hypotheses are as unwise as they are uncalled for and untrue. Evolution may not openly deny God, but at best it robs Him of His personal action and concern in the wisdom, power, and goodness of His will in every part; and its tendency is manifest to exclude Him altogether in contradiction of His word which attests His deep and direct interest in the whole.

It is natural enough that science should boast of what it has discovered and can teach of material phenomena, the laws which govern them, and the results that flow from them. Nor is science to be blamed, because from its nature it cannot rise to moral truth, still less to the knowledge of God. Only those who speak for it are out of court when they venture to deny that anything higher and far more momentous can be learnt in a way incomparably surer than any teaching of man. They are wholly wrong and illogical even, when they affirm that there is nothing to be known beyond the blank wall where all science necessarily stops, unable to lead or go farther. The most thorough-going, the grossest, of materialists must and does confess that science can give no account of the originating cause of all, or, as they say,

“the origin of the permanent causes themselves.”37 Science, says another of these sages, “is wholly powerless to penetrate the mystery which lies behind.” But if science cannot discover, God can reveal. And the Bible begins with His revelation in words simple, clear, and worthy of Him. God would not have His people ignorant of the origin of all things through His power and goodness and wisdom, having called them into relationship with Himself, unworthy as they are, till the only Worthy One bring them to Himself in mercy and truth, then to walk in His light.

Meanwhile, during Israel’s unbelief, grace has provided “some better thing” in Christianity with its heavenly association, wherein we who now believe, while Christ is on high, have our blessed portion. And this epistle does its part to that end.

We may just notice how readily even commentators stray, who speak without entire subjection to the words of Scripture. Thus one who objects justly to those who trust not only the ascertained facts of geology, but the changing and uncertain hypotheses of its teachers, cites “In six days God created,” etc. But this is erroneous. The Bible never speaks so. See Ex. 20:11: “For in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea,” etc. This is the express testimony of the Holy Ghost. The creation proper (Gen. 1:1) was before the six days when particular objects were no doubt created for the Adamic earth. Again, others err by confounding the original creation with the empty and confused state into which (not the heavens but) the earth is shown us in Gen. 1:2; where the idiom as other scripture (Isa. 45:18) rejects the assumption of God’s originally creating a chaos: an idea natural to paganism. “In the beginning God created

the heavens and the earth." The break-up described in verse 2 was a subsequent state, in contrast with the original order, and with the final one detailed for man.

None should be surprised that God's creating should be an object of faith. For as creation brings in the activity of God, so the denial of it, which is the darling of modern speculation, excludes God, and exposes souls to the debasing delusion of materialism. But creation is not all, though it supposes God and, as we are here told, by the word of God, without which all is uncertain reasoning. By faith we understand not only that God created the world, but that the worlds have been framed by the word of God. His word therefore reveals the power of that word, which man knowing the impotence of his own word is apt to despise, as if God was such a one as himself. This is much, but not all, for man is fallen, a sinner departed from God. Creation is here declared to be His work; but sin demands of Him a new work. Man needs a Saviour, and a Saviour by sacrifice, that he may be brought to God. This accordingly is the next truth presented to us.

"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which witness was borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness to his gifts, and through it he, being dead, yet speaketh" (verse 4).

No need is deeper than this. Abel felt the truth of it by faith, having weighed the testimony of God to a coming Saviour as well as the solemn effect that His parents, our parents, having rebelled against God, had brought in for themselves and their posterity. There is no way out of sin to God, except through sacrifice. But the only sacrifice that could efficaciously deal with sin before

God was that of Christ. For Him therefore all saints waited in faith and had witness borne to them. Meanwhile Abel offered by faith a sacrifice in witness of death for sin, the confession of his own guilt, the confession of the grace of God that would righteously deliver from guilt.

No sense of this had Cain, an unrepentant, unbelieving, unconverted man, who brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah. “Of the fruit of the ground!” What could this avail for sinful man? “Cursed is the ground for thy sake” had the LORD God said; thenceforward it should bring forth to man thorns and thistles, but no salvation. Of the ground was man taken, for dust he is, and unto dust he shall return. But the Last Adam is a life-giving Spirit, the Second man is of heaven; He only could avail for fallen man. Alas! Cain looked not to Him but to himself, as natural men do and perish. Believing Abel looked for the woman’s Seed to bruise the serpent’s head, and “by faith offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which it was witnessed to him that he was righteous.”

There is no righteousness without repentance, and there is no repentance without faith. Abel had both; and, as he looked for the Saviour in due time, he meanwhile offered his sacrifice by faith. Thereby a righteous one confessed himself a sinner; therein God saw the witness of the sacrifice in Christ, and bore witness to his gifts. It was a serious thing for the soul of Abel, and God appreciated the gifts that attested the truth as to both God and man: as to man acknowledging his sin; as to God about to send the Son of man the conqueror of Satan. “And through it he being dead yet speaketh;” for who that believes and heard his voice, has not profited by it? God

Himself heard that voice from the ground, though he had died and to every believer it never ceases to speak. Even if Adapt had been after the fall a believer, his voice is not heard: he hid brought in sin and death for all men. But Abel died for his faith, as the witness of righteousness in all the power of sacrifice and of its meaning in the word of God.. and through it he though dead yet speaks. Without sacrifice according to God is no salvation.

But as faith does not always assume the same shape, although it be the same divine principle working in man by the Spirit of God, so in the next witness we see the power of life, not the sense of death. Both are true in Christ, in whom alone they appear in their fullest character, but believers enjoy according to the measure of their faith. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God translated him; for before the translation he hath had witness borne to him, that he had pleased God; and without faith it is impossible to please [him], for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder of those that seek him out” (verses 5, 6). To the same Messiah Enoch looked. There is no ground to suppose that he did not see death written on all, and sacrificial death the only way of deliverance, as Abel did. He knew as his predecessor that the woman’s Seed must be bruised; but he knew also and felt assured that He would bruise the serpent’s head. He saw life triumphant over him that had the power of death; in that faith he walked, and was well-pleasing to God. And his close on earth was accordingly, not by death like Abel, but by a power of life peculiar to himself. By faith Enoch was

translated that he should not see death, and was not found because God had translated him."

We may therefore say that to him it was according to his faith, the witness to that truth a little before the deluge, as was Elijah long after it. Both lived in times of great and growing wickedness; both were prophets of judgment that should not slumber; both were translated on high without death, in witness of the great translation which will be the portion of all the living saints that remain, when the Lord Himself shall descend for them from heaven, and they shall be caught up together with the dead saints, raised to meet the Lord in the air. Enoch testifies of the chancre that awaits Christ's coming, the mystery shown us in 1 Cor. 15:51, 52. The Holy Ghost comments on this well-pleasing walk of faith as concerning every believer, and possible only to faith — faith day by day in our walk with God, faith receiving that He is and becomes a rewarder to those that search Him out.

The next case attests rather God's government of the world than the heavenly grace displayed in Enoch. "By faith Noah, oracularly warned concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world and became heir of the. righteousness that is according to faith" (verse 7). Enoch had warned others, himself caught up to heaven, before the deluge came and took away all save those in the ark. Noah had an oracular warning about things not yet seen, was himself warned and moved with godly fear. So the godly Jewish remnant will be at the end of the age, who pass through that solemn time of divine judgment, and emerge to inherit the earth as well as the righteousness according

to faith, for lack of which the world was condemned. It would have been Noah's ruin, as it was theirs, not to have believed the prophecy till it was accomplished; and so it will be with the world again in a day that hastens.

Any Christian can see that the faith of Enoch is of an evidently elevated character, and aptly finds its answer in our awaiting the Son of God from heaven to take us there; as the godly Jewish remnant corresponds to Noah, looking by-and-by for deliverance through judgment. But we have surely to share his faith also in testifying of that day and the world's doom, a revealed element of separating power. However offensive to the false hopes of men, we are the more bound to proclaim the approaching judgment of the quick as Noah did. The wise and prudent may mock; but faith owes it to God to be outspoken, and love to man should add vigour to the warning, now in particular that we perceive children of God blinded as to the revealed future by unhallowed commerce with the world and the influence of its philosophic incredulity. For men wilfully forget what God has already done in judging the race, and the Saviour's solemn warning that so it is to be again shortly when He is revealed suddenly and unexpectedly as Son of man.

These are the great general and fundamental principles of truth to which faith bows. The universe is not self-existent, but God's work; which if not believed exposes to atheism, as unbelief of His sustaining care and power leaves one a prey to deism. But sin came in through man's unbelief and Satan's malicious wiles — and only a divine Saviour, yet man, can avail by the sacrifice that shadowed His. Again, Enoch shows us the walk that pleases God and is associated with heaven. And Noah teaches the believer of the judgment which awaits the

world, himself not only condemning its evil but preserved to be in another world founded on sacrifice. Hence Noah represents the earthly saints, as Enoch the heavenly.

Among the elders attested in virtue of faith Abraham has a most honourable place. Of him first is it written in the O.T. that he believed [in] Jehovah, and He counted it to him for righteousness; and in the N.T. he is called father of all that believe; in both, the “friend of God.”

Abraham gives occasion to a large and varied scope of faith, and stands at the head of those who illustrate its patience, rather than its energy which wrought in Moses and those that follow. And this is the true moral order: first, waiting on God who had promised; secondly, overcoming difficulties and dangers in His power.

“By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as one not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob the joint-heirs of the same promise; for he awaited the city that hath the foundations, whose artificer and maker [is] God” (verses 8-10).

Abraham is the first sample of God’s call as a public principle. Whatever the secret working of grace in all the saints heretofore, as in Abel, Enoch, Noah, no one had ever been called by God to quit his country, kindred, and even father’s house, as Abraham was. It was the great and new fact of separation to God, and in a land which He would show, sustained by His promise of blessing to himself, yea, of blessing in him to all the families of the earth. It was the more remarkable,

because after the deluge God had instituted government to repress evil; and in the days of Peleg the earth was divided by the sons of Japheth, Ham, and Shem, after their families and tongues, in their lands and nations. In Abraham's time even Shem's progeny served other gods — an evil most portentous, and unknown before the deluge. Out of this was Abraham called of God. The rest of the world was left to itself. God called the man of His choice not to attack or reform the evil, but to Himself and a land He would show him with blessing assured. Separation to God on the call of His grace we see in the man, the family, the nation in which He will be magnified for ever.

This, if believed, involved obedience at once; and so it is here written. The old relationships remained for all but Abraham, in the sphere of divine providence, as of judgment at the end of the age. But the separated man was to follow as God in grace led. He is the depositary of promise, and thus his faith was tested, not at the start only but continuously. The land to be shown in due time was as yet unknown, so as to cast him on simple-hearted confidence in God. He went out in subjection to God's promise, not knowing whither he went. God would show the next step when Abraham took the first. He did not ask, Whither? He trusted God implicitly. Thus his faith was unmixed with calculations of self, resting solely but fully on His word who loves and never deceives.

It was the wise and wonderful working by ways suited to His glory in a world departed from God into idolatry, where present ease, wealth, honour, power, are the bribes of the enemy for all misled by him. Faith gives up all at God's word with not one thing gained for the moment, but the certainty of His guidance and ultimate

blessing in the richest manner. Yet in the history of Genesis it was not faith unmixed: in Haran they halted till Terah died; then “they went forth into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.” The Canaanite too, the vessel of evil devoted to God’s curse, was still in the land while Abraham moved about a stranger. Even after this, faith failed under pressure of famine, and Canaan was left for the plenty of Egypt, but the denial of his wife through fear, and the treasures of the world which followed. Yet God was faithful, judged the prince of the world, and brought back the pilgrim to the land he ought not to have left without His word who had brought him there.

Then verse 9 points out a fine and new trait of the Spirit’s working. “By faith he sojourned [not in Egypt, but] in the land of promise as in one not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob the joint-heirs of the same promise; for he awaited the city that hath the foundations, whose artificer and maker [is] God.” As faith led him into the land, unnamed and unknown to him, so when in it faith not only looked to have it another day from God, while he was content to be an alien without a foot of it as yet, but learnt to await a brighter and better scene. For the city here described stands in contrast with all that is earthly or can be shaken and removed. It is the scene of heavenly glory. Compare verse 16 and Heb. 12:22. The word he heard gave him to look up; and believing he made no haste nor should he be ashamed. Returned from Egypt he has his tent, as had Isaac and Jacob in due time. What did Egypt know of the tent? still less of the altar unto Jehovah. Even the called-out man had neither there: back in the land he has both. The spirit of the’ world is incompatible

with either strangership or worship. And both helped him to draw, from His word who is now before his soul, higher things than those he saw, more durable than the earth, and more worthy of Him who devised and effectuated the universe but is above it all. “The God of glory,” as Stephen says of him, became far better known than at the first. Abraham walked by faith, not by sight.

Yet men have not been wanting to say that the city which God here designs and forms is the earthly Jerusalem. It is impossible to conceive an idea less spiritual or more ruinous of the truth intended. The Epistle as a whole assiduously raises the eyes of those addressed to the city out of sight and on high, which Abraham saw by faith and was glad. Here we have no continuing city, whatever the Jews may receive by-and-by.

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, at this point of setting before us the worthies of faith, to present the lesson taught by a woman who had learnt from God. And it is the more instructive to us, as perhaps no one without the inspired comment would have drawn it from the inspired text. We are quick to discern failure. It needs great grace to appreciate a little grace. How slow to admonish the disorderly, to encourage the faint-hearted, to support the weak, to be long-suffering to all!

“By faith also Sarah herself received power for deposition of seed even beyond seasonable age, since she counted him that promised faithful. Wherefore of one, and that become dead, were begotten even as the stars of heaven in multitude, and as the innumerable sand that is by the sea-shore” (verses 11, 12).

Here is made good the fresh victory of faith. It surmounted utter weakness aggravated by lapse of time far beyond the due age; and on both sides, though the mother is named in the first place, and the father described so as to heighten the wonder of such an overflowing progeny from one as good as dead. If any looked at the parties concerned, if they considered themselves or each other, there were the amplest materials for doubt. And it is evident from the history in Gen. 17 that even Abraham at first had no confidence to boast in an accomplishment so unprecedented, and prayed at that very time that Ishmael might live before God.

Sarah, however, persisted longer in her unbelief; and when Jehovah at a subsequent day set a time for Sarah to have a son, she laughed incredulously and stood gravely reproved — the more because she denied it. But all this makes the grace of God so marked and cheering, as we find an entire oblivion of these early failures, and the later triumph alone here recorded. How undeniable the proof that He loves to speak well of His own! “Is anything too hard for Jehovah?” He overthrew all the thoughts and reasonings of her mind. Her doubts, her equivocations, deepened her self-judgment. His own word carried its own convincing light along with it; henceforward she “counted him that promised faithful.” May we not ask, Is anything too good for Jehovah? Abraham appears to have been peaceful in faith before the turning-point came for his wife. But come it did; and God singles it out for the permanent blessing of souls, tried with doubts as she had long been, that they may rest as she at length did on the word of Him who cannot lie.

And it may be added that, if ever a people passed through difficulties and dangers, distresses and destructions, calculated and planned to defeat the promise of God, even on the comparatively narrow question of their numbers, it was the lot of the Jews. Who knows not the express design and cherished policy of nations great and small, near and far off, often reappearing in the ages, to cut them off from being a people? But even when the power of Rome took away their place, scattering them as captives over the earth, it could not absolutely destroy their nation. Long, long have they abode without king and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim. Yet scattered though they be after this anomalous sort, they are perhaps as numerous as ever. Not yet indeed have they returned into the land of their possession. they are in the city of refuge grace has provided for them, however little they think so or understand His way with them. But the day hastens when, freed from their pollution of blood, they shall look on Him whom they pierced, and be planted in the land that Jehovah gave their fathers, and their blessings be as countless as themselves in that day. For He is faithful that promised. “Thus saith Jehovah, If ye can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.”

That Abraham now has children spiritually in Christians is quite true, as the Epistle to the Galatians demonstrates; but that God has cut off His ancient people Rom. 11 expressly and solemnly denies. His word on which we rest by faith is no less certain for Israel by-and-by, whom He will surely restore and bless nationally, and through them all nations. Psalm 67 with a crowd of other scriptures teaches it, whatever Gentile casuists may argue to the contrary. But the same Rom. 11 had forewarned the professing Gentile, grafted into the olive-tree of promises instead of those Jewish branches broken off through unbelief, that they have no indefeasible claim but stand through faith. And as they are now high-minded and without fear, dishonouring God and His word, in pride of privilege no less than erst the guilty Jews, so shall they be cut off for God to ingraft again the godly remnant of the future "into their own olive-tree"; and "so all Israel (after judicial pruning) shall be saved."

But "that day" is not yet come; and we return to their fathers. From the rising above difficulties insuperable save to God on whose word they relied (verses 11, 12), we have a summary in verses 13-16, which brings out the patriarchs refusing all temptation, and by faith holding on their pilgrim way to death consistently with the accomplishment of promise. This is the reason why the phraseology chances in the beginning of verse 13. It is no longer "in" faith, that is, in virtue (or the power) of faith as in verse 2, where such a force is requisite, and not the mere notion of element or matter as in 1 Cor. 11:20 and very often. Nor further is it the proximate cause, the dynamic or instrumental dative as in verses 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and again in 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27,

29, 30, and 31. Still less does it distinguish faith as the means “through” which, as in 4, 7, 33. Here (verse 13), if we say “in,” we mean according to faith, contrasted with sight or possession of the things promised. What indeed would be the sense of saying that “by” or “through” faith all these died? Nor is it “in” i.e. in virtue of faith, but according to faith as in verse 7 of our chapter, where the precisely same phrase occurs. The Vulgate gives “juxta fidem” here, “per fidem” in verse 7. We may see it again in Titus 1:1, and modified by “common” in 4, in both of which the Vulgate has “secundum.” Conformity with faith is here predicated of Abraham and those patriarchs that followed, not for perseverance to the end though this was the fact, but in being content to wait for God’s fulfilling the promises in due time.

“According, to faith died these all, not having received promises, but from afar having seen and saluted [or, embraced] them, and confessed that they were [“are,” historical] strangers and sojourners on the earth [or, land]. For they that say such things clearly show that they seek after a fatherland. And if indeed they were38 calling to mind whence they went out, they would have had opportunity to return; but now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly. Wherefore God is not ashamed of them to be called their God; for he prepared for them a city” (verses 13-16).

The aim in these verses is to present vividly that common pilgrim path in which the patriarchs walked, even to their death, before the Spirit takes up characteristic workings of faith, even in Abraham as well as in each of those that followed, as far as it bore on the subject in hand and the special help of those virtually

addressed. How timely and needful it must have been we may gather, because they expand the truth already set forth briefly in verses 9, 10.

Neither death, nor the unseen state that succeeds, was the accomplishment of the promises. On the contrary their death without receiving what was promised was in accordance with faith, and the witness of its single-eyed integrity. And the accomplishment of the promises supposed, what they could not as yet understand any more than anticipate, the second advent of the Lord even more than the first, although the first was the far more solemn in itself, and the righteous basis of the blessings and glories which await the second. Hence the force of our Lord's word in John 8:56, "Abraham rejoiced that he should see my day, and he saw and was glad." Neither technically nor substantially was the first mainly in view as has been thought, but that day when God's word and oath shall be vindicated before a wondering and rejoicing world. The patristic dream, which some dream over again, that it refers to what Abraham beheld after death when our Lord was here, is as unwarranted a perversion as the Socinian interpretation which Meyer justly stigmatises (Abrah. exultaturus fuisset, si (ἵνα!) vidisset diem meum; et si vidisset, omnino fuisset gavisurus). The design of our Lord and of that chapter is to prove Himself the Light and Word and Son and God Himself; and hence the contrast between Abraham who believed and his seed who did not. Whatever glimpse Abraham may have had of the truth to which the sacrifice on Moriah pointed, it was to the full accomplishment of the promise he looked, and saw by faith what still awaits fulfilment, the period of Christ's manifested glory, "My day." In this hope brightly

breaking through the clouds Abraham exulted, and he saw, as faith ever sees, and rejoiced. He, like the rest, saw the promises in their accomplishment from afar off.

And so died these all in accordance with faith as they lived, looking forward to Messiah's day for making good the promises. The additions of "and were persuaded" in the Received Text has scanty support of no account, though Dr. J. Owen makes much of it in his Exposition as have many others since. It really enfeebles the truth. It is a delicate question whether the next clause keeps up the figure of "greeting" as well as seeing from afar, or adds the different side of truth in their warmth of taking their hope by faith. But the practical result is as weighty as undeniable; they confessed that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth.

The land even of promise was not their home, still less Chaldea which Abraham left at God's word. They looked higher — to heaven. Life and death alike bore witness that nowhere were they dwellers on earth. Even as they dwelt in tents as pilgrims strangers in the land of promise as a land not their own (yet theirs in hope that makes not ashamed), so they declared plainly throughout that they were in quest of a fatherland on high. Many an opportunity presented itself to return to their old country, had such been their mind. Though they knew not Jesus as we, nor had they as yet known redemption or the Holy Spirit as the Christian, yet their path may well engage us to sing more stedfastly the well-known lines slightly modified-

We're bound for yonder land

Where Jesus sits supreme;

We leave the shore at His command,

Forsaking all for Him.

‘Twere easy, did we choose,

Again to reach the shore;

But this is what our souls refuse —

We’ll never touch it more.”

We look for Him who is not here but risen. It is the world, and we are not of the world as He is not who is coming to receive us to Himself and give us mansions in the Father’s house. For His rejection unto the death of the cross and ascension to heaven have made the earth to us His empty tomb. But we await the glory to be revealed when all the groaning creation shall follow suit of God’s heirs, and our bodies changed into the likeness of Christ’s body of glory shall herald the regeneration in the delivering power of the Redeemer at that day.

No interpretation is farther from truth than that of Grotius and his followers who cannot rise above Judea and Jerusalem in a better state. Had this been all God saw in the life and death of these fathers, He would have been ashamed of them to be called their God. But it is not so. They were men of faith, and looked above, not as a mere sentiment but in living power, as their detractors did not. And God is not the God of the dead but of the living. They live to Him, and shall appear in glory with Christ, when the promises too take effect fully in that day of reprisals. God prepared for them a city better than man’s eye looks on.

Last of these instances which set out the patience of faith comes the crowning trial of Abraham; and worthily does it close the list.

“By faith Abraham, being tried, (hath.) offered up39 Isaac, and he that accepted to himself the promises was offering up40 his only-begotten son, as to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called, having counted that even from the dead God [is] able to raise; whence also in a figure (parable) he received him” (verses 17-19).

It was indeed putting the father of the faithful to the, severest test conceivable, not only abandoning to the altar his only son and heir, and sacrificing him with his own hand, but jeopardising to all appearance the promises both for his seed and in it blessing for all families of the earth. Alike natural affection, and religious hope when raised to high degree and wide extent by God’s word in Isaac, seemed to reason by such a command arbitrarily, distressingly, and irrevocably lost. But we can see with James (James 2:22), that faith wrought with his works, and that by works faith was perfected. In earlier days in hope against hope he believed to his becoming father of many nations, “According, to what had been spoken, So shall thy seed be (Rom. 4:18). Now that the child of the promise was given, how tremendous the wrench at the summons of God so true and gracious! Yet he hesitated through unbelief no more at the surrender, in its form to him most painful, than before at the promise in spite of its utter improbability. Such is faith in which Abraham found strength, giving glory to God, as true faith does.

But there is somewhat more precious and specifically instructive in this instance reserved to the final place for Abraham after the general notice of the patriarchs. Nowhere in the O.T. do we find such absolute trust in God, as when the father was proved willing to sacrifice

his only son, with whom were bound up all God's promises and his own expectations. To man death is the end of hope; to God it is but the occasion to exercise the power of resurrection; and in the assurance of His power on behalf of Isaac, Abraham confided without a waver. He rose early in the morning, he took Isaac his beloved son, and "on the third day" he saw the place afar off. Arrived there he built the altar, set the wood in order, bound Isaac, laid him on the altar, and took the knife to slay him, when the angel of Jehovah interposed at the last moment. The proof was complete. Faith then could to no farther. God was absolutely counted on to make good in resurrection the seed (with the promises in the seed) given up at His word to die. What fresh gain for Abraham, as for those who, doing His will, give up all that is dearest after the flesh, to receive all better than ever in resurrection! In a figure Abraham recovered his son as from among the dead.

God Himself beheld in that solemn transaction the figure of His own gift of the only-begotten Son of God, whom He spared not but delivered up for us all. For Him no substitute was or could be found, if our sins were to be judged and borne and blotted out. In the antitype, far more truly and fully than in the type, God did provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, in His Son the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. In His case the death was as real as the resurrection; and the efficacy of the Saviour's death such that, while the special promises remain for the numerous seed on another day fast approaching, in Him the one risen Seed is blessing come, as the apostle showed the Galatians (Gal. 3), to Gentiles as freely as to Jews. It was outside flesh and beyond law, of God's grace, founded on

sacrifice and declared in resurrection, heavenly glory being its issue and proper display.

See how Christ has made the truth plain in this case as in every other; for indeed He is the truth. He was the true grain of wheat, which, if it fell not into the ground and died, abides alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit. He came that believers might have life and might have it abundantly. He is the Good Shepherd and laid down His life for the sheep. And on this account the Father loved Him, because He laid down His life that He might take it again. No one took it from Him, but He laid it down of Himself. He, and He only from the glory of His person, had title as well as power to lay it down; as He alone had just the same authority to take it again. Hence He, the Son of man, was glorified in death, and God was glorified in Him. And as God was thus morally glorified in Him, God also glorified Him in Himself, and glorified Him immediately after redemption at His right hand, instead of still waiting for the day when He shall come again in power and glory for the world-kingdom. It was Christ cut off and having nothing (Dan. 9:26); but if He thus gave up His rights as Messiah and accomplished redemption in His death, God raised Him, not only to secure all that seemed lost but “some better thing,” to be Heir of all things in heaven and on earth, and to have heavenly joint-heirs, as well as His ancient people and all the nations here below.

To the Hebrews addressed, what could be more telling and instructive? Was it hard to see a light that bedimmed the golden lamp of the temple, and all the splendour of the law? God has provided for us some better thing through Christ dead and risen and ascended.

The next portion is a kind of supplement to the setting forth of that patience of faith, which had its fullest illustration in Abraham. Yet each case has its own distinctive lesson for the disciple.

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob when dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph when ending life made mention of the departure of the sons of Israel, and gave charge concerning his bones” (verses 20-22).

The structure of the phrase in verse 20 draws attention to the difference in the objects of the blessings; for each of Isaac’s sons has the article in the Greek. There might have been no article at all, in which case the mention would have been simply historical. There might have been but one article for both names, the effect of which is to associate as a company at least for this occasion. The repetition has of course the opposite aim of marking their distinctiveness, even though both were blessed concerning things to come. And this is precisely what Gen. 27 clearly indicates, a chapter not a little humbling throughout. Of Esau nothing more need be said than to recall his profanity in selling his birth-right for a pottage of lentiles (Gen. 25), and in his Hittite marriages which caused bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26). Yet Isaac loved him because of his venison, as Rebekah loved Jacob as to whom Jehovah had given her a remarkable word before the twins were born (Gen. 25:23). This Isaac slighted at a critical moment (Gen. 27) when his faith failed at first, no less than his dim eyes. Rebekah was the instigator of Jacob to deceitful ways, instead of both crying to the Lord who would surely have heard Rebekah, corrected Isaac, and honoured

Jacob. Alas! sin wrought shame all round but grace did not fail to secure the purpose of God, while chastising each in His moral government, for all were grievously to blame. Yet the full blessing of promise fell to Jacob in spite of some bad ways, and Esau got through his father's blessing more than he deserved. Isaac's trembling very exceedingly (verse 33) was on the discovery, not only of the guilt of Jacob, but of his own will against God who had overruled him; whereon he says emphatically that he had blessed him, "yea, he shall be blessed." Nature in Isaac sought to bless otherwise, and had seemed all but to prevail; but "by faith Isaac, blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" according to God.

What a contrast appears next! "By faith Jacob when dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped on the top of his staff" (verse 21). When young, he was a sorry saint, a supplanter of his brother, a deceiver of his father, an outcast from his too fond mother, a wanderer to Padan-aram, cheated of Laban though cheating too, living a chequered and sorrowful life once more in Canaan, and a stranger in Egypt, loving his family, yet almost all at home one way or another a source to him of grief and shame. His closing scenes were lit up with brightness, himself kept and blessed of God in spite of himself, that it might plainly be not of him that wills any more than of him that runs, but of God that hath mercy. He is just a miniature of the people, of whom he was progenitor, and to whom he gave his own name of honour through grace. Yet he, the aged pilgrim, blesses the greatest king then on earth, and without any dispute the less is blessed of the better. Now when dying, he blessed each of the sons of Joseph,

though not at all so sundered as Jacob and Esau, yet with a distinction which at the moment displeased Joseph usually so quick to discern and interpret the mind of God. But Jacob's eyes, dim as they were and unable to see naturally, were illuminated then with light divine; so that Joseph's arrangement of his sons according to nature, with Ephraim toward Israel's left and Manasseh toward his right, embarrassed not the patriarch for a moment. For he laid his right hand upon Ephraim's head albeit the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly or crossing them, for Manasseh was the first-born. It was of God to set Ephraim before Manasseh. But how worthy of grace that he who in his youth used such base means to gain the blessing he valued, should ere he died resist, in calm and believing earnestness, the importunity of his godly and honoured son, their own father!

Nor was this all; he "worshipped on the top of his staff," clearly leaning on it in his weakness. It is remarkable that this act really preceded the blessing of his grandsons and is recorded in Gen. 47:31, as given in the Septuagint. No doubt both the Hebrew "bed" and the Sept. "staff" are alike true; and the Sept. gives "bed" in Gen. 48:2. He reminds Jehovah in Gen. 32 of first passing the Jordan, before he recrossed it when he had become two companies. And what changes he had proved since that day, God ever chastening Jacob's ways and ever faithful to His purpose, even then blessing him afresh while He crippled his thigh. Now his eye of faith anticipated His glory who would make all good when pilgrimage should yield to dwelling in the land; and he worshipped.

As Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons is put immediately with Isaac's blessing, so Joseph's faith follows immediately Jacob's worship (compare Gen. 47:29-31). "By faith Joseph when ending life made mention of the departure of the sons of Israel and gave charge concerning his bones." Only it seemed good to the inspiring Spirit to record it here of Joseph; who also impressively charged his sons not to bury him with his fathers, as Jacob sought and had, but to embalm him as the pledge of their quitting Egypt in God's time for the land of promise. No splendour in Egypt dimmed the light of promise to his faith: the nearest to the throne of the world, he is a stranger, looks for resurrection, and anticipates Israel's restoration to the land according to the divine oath to their fathers.

Now comes a fresh series in the display of the power of faith no matter what the enemies, the dangers, or the difficulties; Moses has a place as marked in its power as Abraham had in its patience.

"By faith Moses, when born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw the child [was] beautiful; and they were not afraid of the edict of the king. By faith Moses, when grown up, refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-usage with the people of God than to have temporary enjoyment of sin, deeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking away unto the recompense" (verses 23-26).

Patriotism and family affection could have little play in a strange land; but be as it might, all alike were defied and trampled under foot by the cruel mandate of Egypt's king; and neither feeling, though benumbed by

oppression and slavery, could be lacking to a race called and guided and kept as the seed of Abraham had been in and out of Canaan. But a still deeper principle lay underneath the promises made to their fathers, which bound together with these grand family expectations a hope still more ancient, mysterious, and wonderful. From the beginning of man's sinful and sad history the revelation of the woman's Seed shone as a star from the darkened heavens, the sure pledge of the serpent's destruction one day; and the blessing, not of their own line only but of all families of the earth in one of their line might be dormant, but could not be forgotten, no, not even in a day of affliction. And had not the word of Jehovah come to the first and greatest of their fathers, telling, him that his seed would be a sojourner in a land not theirs, in bondage and affliction four hundred years, but that the nation which oppressed them should be the object of divine judgment, after which the chosen people should emerge with great substance? Was not the fourth generation to see them return to Canaan?

Faith is ever by the word of God; and by what He had spoken of old, supplemented by the dying but inspired words of Jacob and Joseph, faith wrought in the parents of Moses. Nor was the extraordinary beauty of the child a vain sign to the mother's heart. Much more was felt by both than either their own natural instincts of parental love or the horror produced by the merciless command. They looked for the people's deliverer from Egypt ere long; they looked for the Deliverer from Satan they knew not when. Might not this very babe be the leader out of Egypt for Canaan in the fourth generation? Certain it is, they believed in God's intervention for His people and judgment of their enemies, and acted on their faith in

hiding their child for three months. It Was no slight matter to keep the little one so long despite the unscrupulous monarch's edict, and apparently near his palace. When the mother could no longer hide her son, she took for him an ark of papyrus, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch, and laid it with the child therein among the flags of the river's brink, as we are told in Ex. 2. How God used Pharaoh's daughter, and little Miriam, and the mother for the child's care, is known from the same source. Stephen could add that he was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in his words and works. Never was there a case more strikingly providential.

But faith wrought in Moses himself, and in a way full of instruction to us, who need to stand on our guard in a world of appearance and unreality. "By faith Moses, when grown up, refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter." If providence brought him into her house, faith led him out. It was assuredly from no want of ability to estimate the advantage of his position. If the object, again, had been merely the relief of Israel by influence, or even their peaceful migration to Canaan by the skilful use of circumstances, no one could have a fairer opportunity or be better fitted to accomplish the event diplomatically or otherwise. But this would have redounded to the praise of Moses, not to the glory of God, as faith ever and rightly seeks. Accordingly Moses turned his back on all natural and worldly advantages, that God might act for His people and against His foe and theirs.

Here too we are briefly but distinctly shown how it was: "Choosing rather to share ill-usage with the people of God than to have temporary enjoyment of sin" (verse

25). It is, till the kingdom come, an undying claim, and even more imperious since Christ's rejection, and the intimate mutual relation of the members of His body. But Moses is declared here to have entered into its spirit by faith. He apprehended what the people of God are to God, and the responsibility that attaches to the privilege, as he himself was one of them. They were at the lowest ebb, debased, oppressed, hated, feared, and persecuted. He was the nearest man to royalty, and fitted in mind and manners and opportunity to enjoy all that was in and of the world in that day. But he read the sorrows and shame and sufferings of Israel in the light of God's choice, and the intentions of His goodness for a day of power and glory; and he saw the pleasures and pride and pomp in the same light which wrote death and judgment on all as alien from God and hostile to His nature, will, and plan. This is faith; and it was that of Moses, and facts made it clear in due time. For as he went out to his brethren and saw their burdens, he saw an Egyptian smiting one of them, and smote him, supposing that his brethren understood that God by his hand was giving them deliverance. In this he was premature, as fleshly zeal mingled with his faith; and he and they had to learn experimentally ere deliverance came. The day following taught him a serious lesson, when he would have reconciled two as they strove: vainly appealing to them as brethren when he that did his neighbour wrong, as usual, thrust Moses away as more intolerable still! Yet God made the repulsed peacemaker a ruler, judge, and deliverer.

Here however it is faith which is notified, as not only refusing the grandest associations of the world but, harder still when the people of God were so unworthy in

their own spirit and ways, choosing to share ill-usage with them rather than to have temporary enjoyment of sin, were it glossed over not only as position in a court quite unsought, and the duty of gratitude to a benefactress, but with prudent regard for the interests of his brethren, as well as the plea of providence rarely heard under trial, rarely missing when flesh and blood are flattered. When will saints learn that God tries the heart now, and often allows overtures most alluring to test not conscience only but the heart purified by faith? If therefore thine eye be single, said the Saviour, thy whole body shall be full of light; and no man call serve two masters. We have to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, "deeming"" (as Moses did) "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of41 Egypt" (verse 26). It is faith's reckoning which is sure of the end, and thus makes the narrow path pleasant as well as safe. "For he was looking away unto the recompense."

But here it is not without importance to remark that the reward, even in glory, is never the motive which wins the heart to God, but His grace in Christ, when nothing but this could suit God or save us. It is only grace that puts us in our true place or gives God His place. Grace does both fully, whilst it maintains the truth from first to last. But when grace has called us, looking away to the recompense comes in happily and mightily to encourage the heart in the path of trial. Otherwise it would be a balance of other-worldliness set against this world, playing into thoughts of self at bottom, to the exclusion of Christ's will and glory.

The faith which rises above difficulties, and is strong in the power of God in face of the apparently

overwhelming and adverse resources of man, is next set out.

“By faith he forsook Egypt, not afraid of the wrath of the king; for he persevered as seeing the Invisible” (verse 27).

It is the more striking and instructive, because we know at first how far it was otherwise. Then he consulted his eyes and “looked this way and that way; and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid hint in the sand.” When an unjust and heartless Israelite gave him soon to learn that it was no secret, “Moses feared and said, Surely this thing is known” (Ex. 2:12-14). Such is the most heroic man, that no flesh may glory; but he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord. So we see in one that seemed to be a pillar and was named of the Lord honourably in accordance: yet did Peter fail miserably wherein he was most confident, and grace, when natural force was gone, intervened to effect all he vainly hoped in himself and let him know long beforehand that so it would be for his cheer. How wholesome these lessons are! For the believer too readily assumes that he acts in faith when he is trusting his own thoughts and feelings, and so falls under rebuke. We need to look to and lean on the Lord habitually and in detail. So did Moses at length when he forsook Egypt, not, afraid of the wrath of the king. The great secret is added; for he persevered as seeing the Unseeable. It is something to realise that He sees me; but there is far more in my seeing Him.

“By faith he [lit. hath] instituted the passover and the sprinkling of the blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them, By faith they passed

through the Red Sea as through dry [land]; of which the Egyptians made trial and were swallowed up" (verses 28, 29).

A previous difficulty is now faced, the most solemn which can arise between God and the creature; for it is about sin. And the creature when awakened owns its sins, and accepts now in faith His judgment of them as He reveals it; while unbelief palliates and puts off till destruction falls. This was the question raised for Israel in view of Jehovah smiting the firstborn throughout Egypt. Were not the sons of Israel obnoxious too? Could God slur over sin in their favour? Impossible: God cannot deny Himself. Sin must be judged, adequately in His eyes. Thus only can He righteously secure from judgment, which otherwise must surprise the guilty to, their inevitable ruin.

Therefore was the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood. Its standing value lay not in the mere rite, but in the truth it attested; for its most unique feature, the putting of the blood upon the door posts, was never repeated. What a witness to the one offering which avails for ever, in the midst of a system of many and manifold sacrifices till He came whose death vindicated and fulfilled all! Sin was only judged with absolute perfection in the Lamb of God; and herein was God glorified.

So here "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Jehovah then executed judgment (pledge on a small scale of what is to be complete by-and-by); and the seen blood of the lamb staid His hand. He that destroyed the firstborn did not touch those who hid it for a token on their houses. Faith is not our estimate of the Lamb's

blood, but rests on God's perfect estimate. How blessed for every believer!

But God has given us more comfort still, though nothing can be morally deeper than what the Passover expresses. In it, however, God was judging sin and kept outside by the sprinkled blood. But in Christ's death and resurrection we have more: God intervening manifestly as Saviour, and not only as Judge. He turned the waters of death which overwhelm the enemy into ramparts of victory, where He is for us in van and rear. Such is the force of the Red Sea typically: not God staid and kept outside by the Lamb's blood, but now, with that basis laid, His power on our behalf in Christ dead and risen. We believe on Him that raised up from the dead our Lord Jesus, who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification. The type of redemption was not complete till the passage of the Red Sea was added to the Passover.

Many souls stop short at the Passover and lose consequently the assurance of God for them. No doubt it is faith, but "the gospel of our salvation" goes farther, and they should receive it simply and heartily. So even, in the type of Exodus, however safe Israel was on the paschal night, only at the Red Sea do we hear "Stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah." Truly Jehovah "saved that day." Salvation in the gospel sense goes far beyond safety or life, though many to their own loss make it less — and how does not Christ's work in death and resurrection suffer unwitting disparagement thereby? The word of truth corrects all defects of ignorance or of prejudice.

How impressive too is the Holy Spirit's allusion to the Egyptians essaying to cross the Red Sea and drowned. It is just what a large form of unbelief answers to in Christendom. They have adopted the idea of salvation, and we may add of heaven, and strive without faith, without Christ, in their natural state, to claim the hope — at any rate on a deathbed. We do not hear of a single Egyptian sprinkling his door-post with a lamb's blood. People would like to be saved, without confessing their sins or God's judgment of them in the cross of Christ, which is the sole righteous ground of their remission. There could have been no triumph for Israel across the Red Sea without the Passover which preceded.

It is instructive to observe, how the passage of the Jordan is entirely omitted in this Epistle which notices so many persons and facts in the line of faith; how notably the Red Sea is crossed by the sons of Israel. The omission of the one is as characteristic of the truth in hand as the mention of the other. They both illustrate the divine wisdom of inspiration as carrying out the design of God, often if not always beyond the cognisance of the writer. Thus is all scripture truly God's word. If the Jordan had to be introduced in any of the Epistles, that to the Ephesians would have been the place; as in fact the last chapter does distinctly allude to the main scope of the Book of Joshua, the anti-type to Jewish conflicts with the Canaanites. But this is not the theme here, which has in its foreground the wilderness and the tabernacle, and the High Priest, and the sacrifices, especially that of the day of Atonement. Here therefore the Passover and the Red Sea have an all-important and emphatic place, because they present in figure redemption as far as it is accomplished, not yet of

course that of the body or of the purchased possession. It is not only shelter under the Lamb's blood, but bringing out to God from the power of the oppressor. Those who hitherto had been slaves were set free to hold a feast to their Deliverer in the wilderness. The answer to these shadows of the past is in the death and resurrection of Christ, who was delivered up for our offences and was raised for our justification. On this, grounded of course on His personal glory, rests the doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews unfolding Christ in the presence of God on high for its.

But the Epistle to the Ephesians goes higher and brings out our death and resurrection with Christ, and characteristically our being seated in the heavenlies in Him. In the Passover God was a Judge, in the Red Sea a Saviour; He brought Israel not only to be screened from inescapable judgment but to Himself by a deliverance manifest and complete. So for the believer it was His work in Christ dead and risen for us. But in Ephesians we learn that, when we were dead in offences and sins, God quickened us together with Christ and raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenlies in Him. This is what Jordan prefigures: not redemption, completed at the Red Sea, the figure of His death and resurrection for us, but our death and resurrection with Him and our place in Him on high before we are actually with Him. Hence conflict follows in its season with the principalities and the world-rulers of this darkness — in short, the spiritual (hosts) of wickedness in the heavenlies. This clearly answers to the main contents of the Book of Joshua; not the future rest in heavenly glory, but our wrestling against the wiles of the devil who would hinder our taking possession (in the Spirit of

Christ) of our heavenly privileges now, as one with Christ above. Here Puritanism failed no less than Catholic tradition. Neither Augustine nor Chrysostom surpassed John Bunyan or John Owen. Nor were Bishops Hall or Jer. Taylor quite equal to the learned or unlearned nonconformists.

Although therefore it fell not within the divine plan to develop here what we find thereby elsewhere, two illustrations of the power of faith follow of deep interest.

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, having been compassed for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with the disobedient, having received the spies with peace” (verses 30, 31).

Jericho was the first city that confronted the host of Jehovah; it was the key of the land, and a fenced town with a wall such as to admit of a house upon it. It was of all moment that Israel entering on the promised land should learn, that, however they might have to fight, victory depended on Jehovah, and their place was unqualified obedience of His word with confidence in His power. Hence the directions were such as tried the faith of His people and cast them wholly on His intervention; nothing could be devised less reasonable to the eyes or mind of man. The circuit of the city made once for six days by the men of war, following seven priests blowing seven trumpets of rams’ horns after the ark, was a strange sight to the warriors within, each day increasing their scorn. Then came the seventh day with its seven circuits, and the long blast of rams’ horns followed by the loud shout of all the people. Who ever heard of a siege so conducted? Yet was it suited above all to impress not Israel only but their enemies, that He

was there to make them more than conquerors. For the city wall fell down in its place, so that the people went up into the city, each straight before him, and took Jericho devoted to utter destruction. It was evidently and unmistakably before Jehovah, prince of His host. It was only His doing in power; it was theirs in faith subject to His word. It is ours to notice, to believe, and obey now.

And this was the very time when grace wrought conspicuously, where no man could have looked for it, if God had not revealed it there. “By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with those that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace.” The people of Jericho were no more ignorant of Jehovah’s doings in the midst of Israel than Rahab. “I know (said she to the spies before the approach of Israel) that Jehovah hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did to the two kings of the Amorites,” etc. Grace wrought in this disreputable woman, and gave her to believe the bond of goodness on Jehovah’s part with a people utterly unworthy. Grace found not but produced in her the fruit of righteousness by faith, and gave her a place in Israel, Gentile though she was, in the direct line of David the kin(, and so of One incomparably greater, at once David’s Son and David’s Lord. If the king and the people as a whole perished, it was not through ignorance but disobedience of the testimony which she believed, and because of which she risked her life, receiving the spies with peace. For real faith is energetic and dares to please God in the face of death, deaf also to

the pleas of nature and the reasonings of unbelief. Therefore has she her place, not only in the noble army of faith here, but with Abraham himself in the record of the works of faith in the Epistle of James. But these works. were not what men call “good,” they were καλὰ (comely) rather than ἀγαθά (benevolent). They were works which were not only impossible without faith, but owed all their virtue to faith; for apart from faith Abraham’s act would have been heartless murder in its worst shape, as Rahab’s would have been treason against her king and country.

After Rahab the Holy Spirit leads to a summary of the faithful without drawing out individual cases as before.

“And what more do I say? For the time will fail me relating of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David too,42 and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped lions’ mouths, quenched fire’s might, escaped sword’s edge, were strengthened from weakness, became powerful in war, turned to flight camps of aliens. Women43 received their dead by resurrection, and others were racked, not accepting their deliverance (or redemption), that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others had trial of mockings and scourgings yea, and of bonds and imprisonment” (verses 32-36).

It is remarkable and surely not without purpose that historical order is not observed in the names enumerated, any more than in the acts or sufferings of faith which follow. Thus in time Barak comes before Gideon, Jephthah before Samson, Samuel before David; and again the known instances of lions’ mouths stopped,

and of fire's might quenched, were long after women received their dead by resurrection; as others making trial of mockings and scourgings, and bonds and prison were before the conspicuous cases of those racked or tortured, refusing the deliverance they might have had, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

In the Judges as they are called, who succeeded Joshua before the kingdom, faith shone in times of crisis during the ever-advancing declension; and individuality becomes prominent. Gideon's faith stands justly before that of Barak who shared it with another — a woman — to his reproof; and the captain of a freebooting troop has no such place in divine history, as the mighty Nazarite, morally feeble though he was, alone against the Philistines at their zenith. Had he been truly separate, instead of guiltily seeking marriage and evil intercourse with the enemy, what had not God wrought by him! But what a proof of the state of Israel, that all the witness for Jehovah their God then hung on that most failing man! Still Jephthah, especially by his terribly rash vow, so clouded the testimony of faith that one cannot wonder he finds here a place after Samson. It is impossible, if there be any force in what is now suggested, to accept the view that Jephthah, David, and Samuel constitute a second group as compared with the previous three, on the common text which shows a connective particle after Barak, as there really is after David.

It would appear most correct that David only is thus distinguished, to introduce a new character, and Samuel named after him not only as less marked but to connect him with the prophets. Compare Acts 3:24; Acts 13:20. For notwithstanding dark blots, none was so

conspicuous a type of Messiah in both His sufferings and the glory of the Kingdom.

In what follows verse 32, where in allies begin to disappear, we have the converse of the earlier order in our chapter. For examples of the power of faith are first given in verses 33, 34, and the first clause of 35, while the patience of faith is celebrated thenceforward. The introductory “who” passes from those already mentioned down to the latest times of O.T. inspiration if not later still.

We need not particularise, where the scripture before us recounts only signal acts without further specification. But it may be profitable to remark that the energy of faith in subduing kingdoms, being made strong in war, and putting to flight armies or camps of aliens, however in keeping with the time which preceded the gospel, is in no way the model of what the Christian is now called to. Working righteousness must ever rule for man on earth, even when “promises” shall be fully accomplished instead of “obtained” as of old, miracles or no miracles, such as lions’ mouths stopped, fire’s might quenched, or the edge of the sword escaped. “Made strong out of weakness” has quite a different application in ordinary Christian experience from its meaning of old as here referred to. The ground of our difference is plain. Grace is now revealed and reigns as it did not till Christ came, died, rose, and took His seat in heaven. This, as the N.T. shows throughout, chances the whole state of things. To faith old things are passed; new are come. Who can wonder that believes the grand truth even of personal privilege, through Christ dead, risen, and ascended? If one is in Christ, he is a new creation, though the body awaits His coming to change it to the likeness of His

glory. But already even it is the Holy Spirit's temple. Our bodies are Christ's members. With this go new and heavenly relationships and responsibilities. We are not of the world as Christ was not, and we are called to suffer with joy from earthly enemies as He did, our conflict being with the spiritual powers of darkness on high.

After the transitional first clause of verse 35, we find an array of sufferings in which faith triumphed of old. Here is what is more akin to what the Christian may have to face at various times and places.

If the sketch of suffering in faith is pursued still further in these verses, it is the Spirit of God delighting to set out the endurance of the saints for the truth's sake in the worst of times, to encourage souls thus persecuted after Christ came, which Jewish disciples least of all expected. The solution of the enigma lay in His coming again, we who now follow filling up the cap chiefly, though not exclusively, as the prophetic part of the Revelation clearly shows Hence verses 39, 40 point out the connection and withal distinction of the Christian calling, that no intelligent saint might confound things which differ not a little, whatever their partial agreement.

They were stoned, were tempted, were sawn asunder;44 they died by slaughter of sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, evil-entreated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and dens and the caves of the earth. And these all, having been witnessed of through their faith, received not the promise, God having foreseen some better thing for (or, concerning)

us, that apart from us they should not be perfected" (verses 37-40).

Stoning was a punishment enjoined by the law for Jews guilty of idolatry, blasphemy, or other forms of profane rebellion against Jehovah. Hence the peculiar enormity of the death of Naboth and of Zechariah, the wickedness being wholly in those high in authority who perverted it to hurt saints. Nor can we conceive ordinarily a grosser and more daring wrong than that the pious should suffer the death of impiety at the hands of impious rulers, whether by crafty falsehood or in ungovernable rage.

"Tempted" has perplexed the commentators. Some, in the face of overwhelming evidence for the text, have dared to invent readings out of their own heads; as the Syriac (Pesch.)45 has wholly dropped it. No believer ought to question the wisdom of God in giving so striking a place to a sort of trial peculiarly dangerous to certain souls, as the history of even Christian martyrs recalls to mind: some inflexibly resisting at all cost; others alas! that had run well yielding to their shame; some again, who did yield strengthened to suffer triumphantly at last.

"Sawn asunder" was indeed a brutality unknown to the Levitical institutions. David was in a wretched state when he dealt thus savagely with the Ammonite prisoners; as the Syrians retorted at a later day with the inhabitants of Gilead. That the heathen should be cruel was no wonder; but it ill became the generous king, himself long schooled in adversity. Power and prosperity proved greater dangers than to be hunted for his blood by his royal father-in-law.

Massacre by the sword was a common death for the prophets in Israel, if we only hear of Urijah thus slain in Judah.

Next follows the more prolonged suffering in life of those who for one reason or another were not slain. “They went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, evil-entreated:” to some a still more trying test of their faith than if suddenly despatched, whether law or violence might do the deed. The apostle himself had experience of both beyond most — perhaps all. But so it was when the faithful had not the same privileges.

Still before or after Christ the substantial fact remains: God has ever had a line of sufferers that believed. And it was their faith which made them objects of dislike and persecution. Nor was it so much their denunciation of the world, its pursuits, pleasures, iniquities, or impieties, but the most quiet and most telling of all testimonies — separation from it to God and His word. Now we can add distinct and positive witness of Christ crucified, yet glorified. This is above all things offensive, especially when backed by the solemn assurance of His coming to judge the world, but surely (as being true) due in love and compassion to it as to His glory, too. Hence the deepest hatred underneath the placid pretensions of today’s liberalism. But it will break out afresh, as the Revelation proves. They are those whom the world cannot overcome, say or do what it may. “Of whom the world was not worthy,” though they were counted unworthy of a place in it or even of life. But, as has been said, in condemning them it condemned itself; and God forgets neither.

Hence they were outcasts often, roaming in deserts and mountains, and dens and the caves or chinks of the earth. How this was repeated in pagan and papal persecutions since the Epistle was written needs no evidence here. In the world's eyes they were implacable and impracticable. Nothing won them, wealth, ease, or honour; nothing subdued them, detraction, hatred, prison, or death. They refuse present glory, They remember who was crucified and by whom; they await His day and see it approaching.

"And these all, having been testified of through their faith, received not the promise, God having foreseen some better thing for (or, about) us, that they apart from us should not be perfected."

Whatever the differing circumstances, enemies, or sufferings of these saints, this is true of them all. However attested through their faith, and receiving promises to sustain them they did not receive the promise fulfilled, for which all wait. For God had meanwhile to bring in a new and better thing on our behalf, while Christ, having been rejected, is at the right hand of God on high. Hence, though the ground was laid for all blessing when Christ came the first time, the fulfilment of all awaits His coming again; and when God's provision for us is complete, they will be perfected, not before.

Verses 39, 40 are all the more striking because they are the conclusion of a chapter remarkable for the honour which the Spirit of God puts on the faith of God's witnesses from the beginning of the O.T. But there is the preliminary correction of the Jewish tendency to begin with Abraham and confine their regard to the father and

the sons of the chosen people. Abel, Enoch, and Noah occupy each a bright place in the goodly roll. Again, at the close still more care is taken to impress on the Hebrew believers the special privileges peculiar to the Christian. This the Spirit itself throughout shows that they had not as yet duly estimated; and even those who had once known it are apt, under stress of trial and little faith, to forget if not slight it,. Where these new blessings have never been understood by divine teaching, how common it is to hear objectors ask, Do you mean to say that such as you are more blessed than faithful Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is your portion richer than that of Moses or Joshua? Of Samuel or David? Of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Daniel? Such thoughts quite overlook the incalculable change brought in by the world's rejection of the Christ the Son of God; by the redemption He accomplished for those who believe; by His glorification at God's right hand is the pledge of ours; by the Holy Spirit sent down meanwhile to abide in us as unction, seal, and earnest.

The apostle does not here enter into the details by the way, but he does allude to the incomparable riches of grace now made ours through Christ's cross, and displayed in Him risen and seated in heaven. These the objectors ignore in the unbelief which would reduce all to a dead level, and leave no room for the working of sovereign grace to the praise of the crucified Lord of glory, and of the Spirit's personal indwelling presence to reveal divine counsels previously hidden. That "God foresaw some better thing for us," as compared with all that of old obtained witness through faith, is thus briefly summed up. There are other Epistles which develop our

heavenly standing in Christ yet more than this to the Hebrews.

But what could any saint of the O.T. have made of such language as we find given here throughout? He “having made the purification of sins sat down on the right hand of the Majesty, on high”(Heb. 1:3).”Both he that sanctifieth and the sanctified [are] all of one” (Heb. 2:11). “Christ as Son over his house, whose house are we, if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end” (Heb. 3:6). “Having therefore a great high priest, passed as he is through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession” (Heb. 4:14). “Though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered, and having been perfected, became author of everlasting salvation to all that obey him” (Heb. 5:8, 9). “Anchor of the soul both secure and firm, and entering within the veil where Jesus entered, forerunner for us, became high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:19, 20). “Such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). “Now he hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much as he is mediator of a better covenant, such as hath been established on better promises” (Heb. 8:6). He “by his own blood entered once for all into the holies, having found an everlasting redemption” (Heb. 9:12).

These wondrous facts of His atoning work and priestly office involve commensurate blessings for those to whom they are now made known. Take this example from Heb. 10:2: “the worshippers once purged should have no more conscience of sins.” How could any saint before redemption have conceived such a boon? The

difficulty is to find one since apostolic days who really appropriates truth so opposed to natural thought. Another from verse 19 of the same chapter may suffice: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness for the entrance of the holies by (or, in) the blood of Jesus, a recent and living way which he dedicated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, as our hearts have been sprinkled from a wicked conscience, and our body washed with pure water,” etc. Truly if these known blessings had been all, God provided “some better thing for us,” which the most intelligent saint before Christ’s work was done and the Holy Spirit given, could not even have apprehended.

But God was pleased for His own glory, and to the honour of His crucified and exalted Son, thus to bless believers now, as those of old were not nor could be. Meanwhile His heirs and Christ’s joint-heirs are being called according to purpose, before the Lord comes, when we and all the O.T. saints shall be perfected in the likeness of His body of glory, and go to meet Him on high.

37 Mill’s Logic, eighth edition, 398-400.

38 Tischendorf and Tregelles read the present, others the imperfect.

39 It is difficult to express in English the force of the Greek perfect and imperfect. The one gives the result of the act as if accomplished, the other the historical fact that it did not actually take place. “Hath” here is not really admissible in our tongue; yet it may be in a bracket to enforce the truth.

40 Ibid.

41 It is scarce needful to point out how superior in moral force is the critical reading “of Egypt” (D E K L P) to the Text. Rec. or Lachmann’s strangely elliptical form.

42 Later editors reject the copula after David on small but ancient authority.

43 Lachmann adopts here the evident blunder of A Dp.m. (to which we can now add p.m.) which strangely made “women,” not the subject as it is, but the object, and, stranger still, in apposition with “their dead.”

44 The order differs in MSS. Dgr. L P, etc., have “tempted” before “sawn,” the rest in the more common way.

45 The Philoxenian Syr. Version fails after verse 27.

Hebrews 12

The distinctly hortative part of the Epistle now follows, though we have had exhortation interspersed almost from the first. But henceforth it greatly predominates with weighty words of instruction also in both the closing chapters. The object throughout is to deepen the faith of those used to religious objects of sight, to establish souls in the unseen and heavenly through the word and Spirit of God, and to unfold Christ's glory in person, work, and offices. He is here accordingly introduced not as the object of faith as before, but as the Leader, fulness, and crown of all who from the first trod the path of faith here below.

"Wherefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, lay aside every weight and the readily besetting sin, and run with endurance the race set before us, looking off unto Jesus the leader and perfecter of faith; who for the joy lying before him endured crucifixion, despising shame, and is set down at right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that hath endured such contradiction by the sinners against himself, that ye be not wearied, fainting in your souls" (verses 1-3).

The witnesses who lie all around are those described and summarised in the chapters before, not spectators of us as some have unintelligently imagined, but men that obtained testimony from God in virtue of faith. Now and then, here and there, mainly of the chosen people, but carefully shown to have lived and suffered in faith before Abraham, they form a grand cloud, each characterised by some proved fidelity to God's will, a

few by more than one, none by more than “the friend of God.” But what was he, variously tried and faithful, compared with “Jesus,” as this Epistle often and with divine intent calls our Lord? In His path, in His testimony, for this is what is here in question, the light shone full and unrefracted. Its unwavering equality marks its unity of perfection. Yet never had been, never can there be again, such depths and such comprehensiveness of trial, apart from that which it was His alone to bear, in His suffering once for sins. to effect everlasting redemption.

Hence the saints are urged, laying aside as a settled thing every weight and the sin that so besets and entangles them, to run with endurance the race lying before them, looking with full view on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. To be sanctified through the offering of His body is a divine act of grace with an abiding effect (Heb. 10:10). Reconciliation to God and justification, as in the Epistle to the Romans and elsewhere, are not a gradual process, like growth or practical holiness. But even in practice we are called on, not to be getting rid of every weight that encumbers and the sin that besets in continuous detail, but to have done with such and all as a fixed principle and an accomplished act. There are habits and superfluities that hinder the Christian, anxious thoughts and cares that oppress and distract the spirit. To run well in such circumstances is as impracticable as if the sin broke out which demands self-judgment and humiliation. Parley is fatal, delay dangerous. Both weights and sin therefore are to be put off absolutely. It is in vain to trust our moral power. We must look away, from every one and every thing without or within, to Him who is as mighty

to deliver as He graciously waits on our need. Power is not in the first man but in the Second; and even here, surely we may say, that God is thereby as in all things glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might for the ages of the ages, Amen.

But it is not without importance to understand that our Lord is here presented, not as the objective channel of the grace we ever need, but as the unrivalled leader and completer of faith in the whole extent of its course. "Our" faith misleads, especially with "author and finisher," as if the Holy Spirit were here setting Him forth as beginning faith in our souls and carrying it on to the end, its source and sustainer. Not so: He is viewed as leader and perfecter in the race of faith in its entirety. In that race let us run. It cannot be without endurance any more than faith right through. But "through" or "by means of" endurance is here inadequate. The apostle uses the preposition also to express condition, as in Rom. 2:27. "With" in this case is right. In a world departed from God the believer's course lies through persecution, detraction, and hatred; and thus he must make his way with endurance or patience.

Herein our Lord was proved to the uttermost: "Who for the joy lying before him endured crucifixion, despising shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Compare Matt. 11 at the end, and John 13:31, 32; 14, 17, as testimony of the joy in His view; but love, yea the Father's glory, was His motive, however the future joy cheered Him along the way. Even for us it is the same thing in principle; and the new nature, in the knowledge of God and His Son, renders us capable of it. Reward, however glorious, is never the motive; yet is it most animating in the face of danger and trial.

“Crucifixion is here used to express the character of what the Lord endured, as we cannot say “cross” in English without an article, though we can speak of “shame” in being despised. The answer to it is His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. The suffering and the glorious issue are alike His only. No one sits there but Himself who vindicated the glory of God compromised utterly by man. Now is man in His person set on an immutable foundation by the death of the cross. God is glorified in Him, as He glorified Him in Himself, and this immediately, without waiting for the day when the world-kingdom of Him and His Christ shall come. The Son of man is set down at the right hand of God’s throne. He has carried manhood into that glory whence He came down in love to do the will of God, accomplished redemption, and gone back again in God’s righteousness which we are made in Him.

Therefore the word is, “consider him that hath endured such gainsaying, or contradiction, by the sinners against himself, that ye be not wearied, fainting in your souls.” To flag is a great danger, and never excusable; for there He sits to cheer and bless who once endured such gainsaying as none other did or could. They were sinners against themselves undoubtedly, as read the Sinaitic and the Clermont MSS., etc. But the far more solemn fact is that they were “the sinners against himself,” who endured all in love to win them to God. Who ever met with a people (His people!) so rebellious? Disciples so fearful and cowardly? Betrayed by one, denied by another, deserted by all the most trusted! It was not only that sinners contradicted, or that saints fled, but God Himself forsook, as it must be if sin was to be judged fully. O, how little have the saints to weary

them in comparison! and why faint in their souls who see Him on high, their sacrifice and priest, life, righteousness, and glory?

From persecution causing saints to suffer the transition is easy to the needed discipline of our God as the Father of spirits.

“Not yet did ye resist unto blood, contending against sin; and ye have quite forgotten the exhortation such as discourseth with you as with sons, My son, despise not Jehovah’s chastening, nor faint when convicted by him; for whom Jehovah46 loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. For47 chastening ye endure: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son [is]48 he whom a father chasteneth not? But if ye are without chastening, of which all have been made partakers, then ye are bastards and not sons” (verses 4-8).

There is danger of relaxation and shirking the consequences of fidelity to the Lord and the truth. It was very far otherwise with Him, who, when He had finished His work of living testimony, Himself the substance of it necessarily alike from His glory and His love in humiliation, gave Himself up as willing captive and victim, that the will of God might be done in every way to His glory. But the saints were not yet resisting unto blood, whatever had been the case with some in early days of whom we hear in the Acts of the Apostles. And they had utterly forgotten the, fatherly exhortation such as speaks to us in the Proverbs, as to sons expressly. It has a two-fold character that we should neither despise the divine chastening, nor faint when so dealt with. He never causes a needless tear; He acts towards us in

perfect love. Can we not trust Him? Contending against sin in an evil world entails suffering, and in the same suffering without chastisement. But they may and do sometimes coalesce; and in every case we wrong Him who watches over us in love, if we either slight His hand or repine under it. How often His action which calls us to suffer is to guard us from what would grieve the Holy Spirit of God, rather than because we have sinned! And it is happy for us when it is so. He who was employed to write to these Christian Hebrews knew it in his own experience better than any other, though many in their measure have proved how true it is still. So in the Gospel of John our Lord speaks of His Father purging every branch of the Vine that bears fruit, in order that it might bear more fruit. We need to believe His word that we may interpret His dealings aright.

The commonly received text which substitutes the conditional “if” (εἰ) for the preposition “for” (

εἰς) is an unquestionable mistake, resting on few and late witnesses opposed to weight and antiquity, and due apparently to a presumed simplifying of the clause. Tischendorf who had wavered returned to the true reading, as do all critics who adhere to diplomatic evidence, unless a motive for chance were probable. Here the motive wrought the other way in the modern copies; for it seemed to balance the seventh verse better with the eighth. Whereas in fact the ancient reading preserves the application of the O.T. citation simply and with far more directness and energy. Erasmus led the way wrongly, following a Greek MS. of not much value, and others followed the Dutch scholar. The Vulgate too had the mistranslation of in disciplina,” which should of course have been the accusative as in its Fulgentian

copy. The Velesian forgery made the Greek to match the error. The sense is, Not for harm but for good, for chastening ye endure. It is the unfailing portion and token of God's family here below. Therefore the challenge follows, What son is there whom a father chastens not? To be without such dealing, of which all have become partakers, would rather warrant the inference of being spurious, not legitimate sons.

How blessed for the believer that as grace saved, so it abides; not in the least to hinder the moral government of God, but to bind up inseparably His holy watchful oversight and discipline of our souls with His unfailing love! Easily might we all, as many a one through unbelief does, misunderstand His ways in chastening us, as if they indicated nothing but His displeasure and our own danger of course still; and the more, because of having tasted in a small measure that He is gracious. But such a doubt really wrongs both His love and His truth, and loses sight, of the relationship He has established between Himself and us, and of His faithfulness if we have to mourn any faithlessness to Him. It is utterly a mistake that, where life is, a bright sense of His unchanging grace, even in scourging every son whom He receives, enfeebles our practical devotedness to His will. On the contrary, His word calls on every child of His to cherish confidence in His grace, as our standing before Him (Rom. 5:2; Heb. 12:28; 1 Peter 5:12), that we may the more deeply judge ourselves, our inconsistencies, and our failures. So even the irreverent and careless Corinthian saints were told that we are chastened by the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world; as all unbelievers must be, for their works are only evil, and faith in God null.

The general principle and the necessity for present chastening, have been shown which every Jew would but recognise as a familiar truth from that great repository of divine wisdom applied to the life on earth, the Book of Proverbs, so characterised throughout by the O.T. title of relationship. Certainly this is not enfeebled but deepened by the more intimate name in which God has now revealed Himself by and in His Son. Here, however, all as to this is intentionally general. It was through the Gospel and Epistles of John that the Holy Spirit brought out the Father In relation, and the divine nature in all the fulness of God.

Now we have a development, closely connected with and following up what has been already considered. “Further, we used to have fathers of our flesh as chasteners, and to pay reverence: shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they for a few days chastened as seemed good to them; but he for profit in order to the partaking of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be of joy but of grief; but afterward it yieldeth peaceful fruit of righteousness to those that have been exercised thereby” (verses 9-11).

These words appeal to what nature itself teaches to be inherent in the relationship of father and son. We could not but know in our own experience, when the folly bound up with the heart of a child had to meet a father’s discipline. Yet did we stand in awe of them. Thus has God constituted man. Shall we not then be much more in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For this is a grand aim of the Epistle; not only faith in the person, work, and offices of Christ, but living by faith, instead of drawing back: so Heb. 10 urges, and Heb. 11 illustrates,

crowned by the beginning of Heb. 12. The superior dignity of the Father of our spirits over the fathers of our flesh is evident; but not more so than the unfailing character of His training, and the worthy end no less sure. Many an earthly father vacillates, some are manifestly unwise and unworthy, none absolutely and in all things reliable; yet we used to pay them, respect during the “few days” of their authoritative training, whatever might be the failures now and then through the infirmities of the flesh. For they could not rise above what “seemed good to them”; and they might be and were mistaken sometimes. Not so the Father of spirits, God alone wise, who is good and does good, acting unerringly for our advantage in order to our partaking of His holiness.

This is a high standard undoubtedly; but it could not be other if He undertakes the charge of us, as He does. Even with His ancient people His word was, Be ye holy, for I am holy; and so the apostle of the circumcision cites and urges on the elect of the dispersion. The same truth our Lord Himself impressed on the disciples when He compared Himself to a vine, the true Vine, His Father to the Husbandman, and them to the branches. Every branch bearing fruit, said He, My Father purgeth, that it may bear more fruit. Here it is the discipline God carries on in every son He receives to Himself. The child-training may seem, while it goes on, not joyous but grievous; but the end is as sure here, and not merely in an after-state, as the loving wisdom that directs it for profit. What can there be comparable (we being what we are, and the world so perilous and unimprovable and ensnaring) to our partaking in His holiness? What a practical privilege!

It may be noticed that Hellenistic literature, in none of its copious and varied remains, uses this word ἁγιότες. Yet is it the simplest derivative that expresses quality from ἅγιος, holy. It occurs in the apocryphal second book of Macc. 15:2, but is not correctly rendered in the Vulgate, followed by Wiclif and his follower, and the Douay, etc. For “with holiness” qualifies “him who beholds all things,” rather than the day forehonoured by Him. Some may not be aware that Alford, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort adopt it in the text of 2 Cor. 1:12, where others have ἁπλότητι, a word easily confounded with it by a hasty eye. It is adopted without even a marginal question by the Revisers.

Verse 11 closes this part of the subject with the effect of chastening in another form, which is still more nearly akin to John 15. Afterward chastening yields peaceful fruit of righteousness to those that have been exercised by it. God effects the profit in such as have submitted to the trial: it is lost so far as we slight the trial or doubt His love in sending it.

The apostle resumes his exhortation after the episode of divine discipline which had occupied the previous verses, wholesome for any but especially for such as confessed the Lord Jesus from among the Jews. Christianity deepens that personal training which Job opens to us from early days and on the broadest ground; as the Book of Proverbs, which is here applied, carried it home with minute care and sententious wisdom in Israel, where Jehovah’s name was known. But the figure is now enlarged, from running the race to the straight paths for the walk, specially desirable for the weak in the way; and we know from Rom. 14, 15 whence these

came, and wherein weakness consisted of collision with Gentile brethren who boasted of strength.

“Wherefore lift up the exhausted hands and the enfeebled knees; and make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame be not turned out of the way but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all, and holiness without which no one shall see the Lord; watching, lest any one lack the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble [you] and through it many49 be defiled; lest [there be] any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one meal sold his birthright. For ye know that, even when afterwards wishing to inherit the blessing, he was rejected (for he found no place for repentance) though he sought it earnestly with tears” (verses 12-17).

We see here the all-importance of faith for the walk, as Heb. 11 had illustrated from of old, and the Epistle throughout had urged as the spring of power and hinge of blessing for the Christian. It is failure in this respect that exposes to all feebleness; and confidence in God and the word of His grace is. what kindles the spark into a steady flame. To sight the Jews were peculiarly prone from their system and the thought it. nourished disposed them to look for immediate effects and displayed power. As Greeks seek wisdom or philosophy, Jews ask for signs; and this was apt to affect unconsciously the baptised; for disappointed expectations which had no warrant from the truth left them jaded, weary, and weak. Hence the call to restore the exhausted hands and enfeebled knees; and to make straight paths for their feet, that what was lame should not turn aside but rather be healed. The joy of present love and of future glory are set before us with the strongest assurance; the

needed sorrow in our experience is turned into blessing by the way; and our chastening shown to be the fruit of divine love for profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness who loves us. For so we read here of that which we are apt to regard only in the light of requirement. Such is the object and end of His discipline for profit of the best kind.

But if His love be lost sight of, the hands hang down and the knees are paralysed. Faith has no energy save in the confidence of His grace. So it is everywhere as a matter of teaching from Romans to Hebrews, and from Hebrews to the Revelation. It was always true; it is clear as light since Christ came. He Himself is the unflagging witness of it in sufferings beyond all comparison. And none can forget it without immediate loss.

Further, the word is “pursue” (which is stronger than “follow”) “peace with all and the holiness without which none shall see the Lord” (verse 14). Having peace with God through our Lord Jesus, we are exhorted to seek it diligently in practice, where there are so many sources of disagreement; and this not only with one another but with all. God Himself is the God of peace; and His children are to reflect His character. But there is a still more imperative warning attached to the exhortation to “holiness,” “without (or, apart from) which none shall see the Lord.” Here it is ἁγιασμός, not merely the quality in its abstract form, but in its action or its result as applied to us; and so found throughout the N.T. (Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 2:15; and 1 Peter 1:2). There is nothing to alarm the most timid in this, more than in all the scriptures which insist on conformity to God’s will in all that are His (Rom. 2:7-11; 1 Cor. 9, 10, 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:19, 20,

Gal. 6:7, 8; Eph. 5:5-7; Titus 2:12, Titus 3:8; 1 Peter 1:14, 1 Peter 2:3; 2 Peter 1, 2, 3; 1 John 2, 3; Jude; Rev. 21:8, Rev. 22:15).

This is only strengthened by what follows: “Looking to it lest any one lack (or, fall short of) the grace of God.” Without the heart’s resting on His grace and consequently on Christ and His work, all is vain; because all is man, and fallen man, presuming otherwise to seek acceptance with God. In such a condition there never can be an adequate sense of sin any more than of holiness. Grace, the grace of God, enables the soul to judge itself unsparingly, and to delight in the unsullied nature of God. because it gives in Christ the life which suits God perfectly, and the propitiation which blots out our sins. This indeed is love, not ours (though we do love) but His in its blessed fulness. It is sovereign grace; of which souls fall short, who dare to approach God in virtue of their own doings or of acts done for them by mortal man, to both of which Israel had recourse, perhaps as much as the heathen.

If self-righteousness be excluded, and outward rites be in lieu of Christ, more evidently hateful to God is “any root of ‘bitterness” which springing up should trouble, and thereby the many or mass be defiled. For such is the effect of evil, as is shown in 1 Cor. 5 and Gal. 5 under the figure of leaven, as here by a root of bitterness. It might take a variety of forms; and here we have specified carnal impurity and profanity, both intolerable where God is and is known. Of the latter evil Esau is the instance, who for one meal sold his birthright. Every Hebrew was familiar with a tale humbling indeed for all concerned; but Esau stood on unhallowed ground, where God’s promise yet more was despised than any

such birthright. What a warning to those Hebrews in danger of giving up incomparably better blessings with Him whose kingdom did not immediately appear, as they fondly hoped! It was not repentance that Esau earnestly sought with tears, but the blessing which his father even had wished wrongly to alienate from Jacob, the heir designated of Jehovah from before their birth.

From the unbelieving, despisal of grace in Esau and from its sad issue, we turn on the one hand to a tremendous yet undeniable view of the law with its menacingly fatal accompaniments, and on the other to a comprehensive assemblage of the bright objects which grace will effect and display, into which faith even now introduces those who believe. Both parts of the contrast powerfully carry on the argument and aim of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Were any disposed to slip away from Christianity and return to the Levitical system of their fathers? Here they are invited to look on the two sides of the picture sketched by the unerring hand of the Holy Spirit, where every element is derived from scriptures which no Jew could dispute. 2 Cor. 3 gave a similar antithesis admirably suited to enlighten and admonish the church of God in the capital of Achaia, where Jewish boasting was at work to act on those who came from the Gentiles. Here the mode of dealing is not less skilfully directed to warn and win those of Israel who were tempted to return to Judaism. Let us look at the dark side which comes first.

“For ye have not approached to [a mount]50 palpable and aglow with fire, and to gloom and darkness and tempest, and a trumpet’s sound and voice of words,

which [voice] they that heard entreated that no word more should be addressed to them; for they could not endure what was charged: And if so much as a beast touch the mount, it shall be stoned; and, so fearful was the appearance, Moses said, I am affrighted and trembling all over" (verses 18-21).

The Christian position is not the Jewish one improved, but contrasted with it distinctly and fully. Israel did approach to Sinai. There they received the law in which they boasted over the Gentiles who know not God, who have no polity from Him nor covenant with Him. As for the nations, their judgment and their dignity proceeded from themselves. Might and craft were their deities, with demons behind them. Therefore they sacrificed to their net, and burnt to their drag. The Jew, instructed out of the law, was sure he himself was a guide of the blind and a light of those in darkness; whereas in truth through his transgression of the law he habitually dishonoured God. The name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the Jews, as their prophets attested.

But here we are given to see God in the most solemn way at Sinai intimating the end from the beginning. The law of God is and must be crushing to the pretensions of man as he is; for Israel were sinners as others, and the law could only be to such a ministry of death and condemnation. If law be the ground of action, how could God acquit the guilty? Here therefore our attention is drawn to the entire scene from the first as one of the most awful signs on God's part, of abject terror on His people's. The mount to which their fathers had approached was palpable, like the rest of their system; but, more than that, it was all aglow with fire, the

symbol of God's destructive judgment. And, adding to the horror, gloom was there and darkness and tempest, not light and peace serene and bright but just the opposite. Above the glare and the black obscurity and the storm, an unearthly trumpet sounded its alarm, and a voice of words more awful still: so that those who heard that voice deprecated its reaching them more. Most ominous was that which is charged: who of mankind could endure it, when even if a beast touched the mount it was to be stoned? If such 'Must be the doom of the unconscious brutes, where should the sinner appear? Yea, the very mediator of the law, honoured of God and familiar with His presence, could only say at that fearful vision, I exceedingly fear and tremble all over.

Such was the characteristic approach of Israel to God when about to hear the law. Their own scriptures declare this and the like only to have been God's aspect towards them — this their feeling and state before Him. Assuredly it is not so that the confessors of the Lord Jesus approach God in the gospel. There we hear of the gift of His love in His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth may have eternal life — in Him who suffered for our sins on the cross. It was He who bore the judgment and went down into death. The gospel reveals the Saviour as life and propitiation, God sending His own Son for both purposes; that as we live through Christ, so through His stripes are we healed. We are saved by grace: but the cost was God's through the reconciling death of His Son; and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now if any of the Jews who confessed such a Saviour were growing weary and turning back to

Judaism, let them weigh what they give up in the gospel, and to what they must return under the law.

We have been shown what does not stamp the Christian confession but the Jewish. Here we are told in a few expressive clauses what is our portion, though in hope.

“But ye have come to mount Zion; and to a living God’s city, heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels, a universal assemblage; and to an assembly of firstborn ones enrolled in heaven; and to God judge of all; and to spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus mediator of a new covenant; and to blood of sprinkling better than Abel” (verses 22-24).

This bright statement was pre-eminently suited and intended to disabuse and raise the hearts of the unbelieving Hebrews, as it is admirable for the instruction of any and all saints who desire to learn. The conjunction simply and effectively introduces and connects each of the objects in a remarkable order after the first, as we shall see. This was overlooked in the A.V. following other translators, to the ruin of the meaning between the latter clause of verse 22 and beginning of verse 23.

No mountain in the O.T. stood in such formal contrast with Sinai as Zion. The one was, as just noticed, the never-to-be-forgotten scene of national responsibility to the law; the other the intervention of Jehovah in grace for His king when all was ruin, people and priests alike wicked, the ark taken by the Philistines, Ichabod confessed, Israel’s king and his sons slain, and the Jebusite not only in the centre and stronghold of Jerusalem but defiant and insulting. Then it was that Jehovah, as He chose David, so also chose the mount

Zion which He loved. And there will He set His king, upon His holy hill of Zion. “I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; I this day have begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them, in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” These Psalms and others speak of a future day, of a new age when Messiah shall reign over Israel and the nations. But our Epistle simply introduces mount Zion compared with Sinai and its legal associations, as the expression of divine grace interposing to establish the kingdom after a scene of grievous sin and long humiliation. “This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.” “There Jehovah commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”

To mark this aim, we may notice how the Holy Spirit connects with Zion, not as a Jew might have expected, the well-known city of David, earthly Jerusalem, but “a living God’s city, heavenly Jerusalem.” If Zion was morally the highest to be descried here below, we now leave earth behind and by faith behold the city for which Abraham looked, as God prepared it for such as were pilgrims and strangers on earth, a city which hath the foundations, whose maker and builder is God. It is the seat of glory in the heavenly places for the holy sufferers with Christ who shall also be glorified together; and He who is a living God is bound in love and honour to give it thus effect.

Then follows the mention of “myriads of angels, a general assemblage.” They were the natural or indigenous denizens of heaven, all God’s hosts that excel

in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Here they are presented in their fulness of various order. Another inspired writer tells us that he heard their voice, and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.

Further, the Christian Hebrews are said to have come "to the assembly of firstborns enrolled in heaven." There need be no hesitation in identifying this heavenly company. It is the church of God, of which we hear so much and of the deepest interest in the Acts of the Apostles and the other Epistles, as the Lord when here below spoke of it as about to be founded (Matt. 16:18), so that Hades' gates should not prevail against it. The day of Pentecost (that followed His death, resurrection, and ascension) first saw the new sight. It is described here according to the divine design of the Epistle. This accounts for putting forward the aggregate of those who compose it, firstborn ones, rather than the elsewhere familiar figures of the body of Christ, and of the temple of God — His habitation by the Spirit. And those. who compose it are here characterised: (1) in relation to Him who was carefully shown us in Heb. 1 to be the Firstborn, the established Heir of all things; (2) in relation by grace to our proper and destined sphere of glory, heaven, and not earth where Israel as such rightly look for their blessedness and triumph under Messiah's reign. Those who are holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, being children, are heirs also, heirs of God and Christ's joint-heirs. He is Firstborn, alone in personal right and result of His work; but they are also firstborn truly though of divine grace. And further, they are enregistered or enrolled in heaven by divine counsel

and the same grace, citizens of heaven which justly pales every other citizenship and lifts above it.

When this glory is presented, we can have none higher than what rises before us, the due and necessary summit of all, “and to God, judge of all,” to whom the various objects preceding are an ascending scale. It is God in His judicial, His universally judicial, glory, not of His people only as in the magnificent Psalm 55 but here “of all” without exception. The millennial era will be the grand display of this, as doctrinally set forth in Eph. 1:10, Col. 1:20 (cf. Phil. 2:10, 11), and prophetically in Rev. 21:9 et seqq.

Thence we of course descend, “and to spirits of just made perfect.” These are the O.T. saints. They had had to do with God before grace reigned through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ as we know it in the gospel. When faith rested on promise, they looked for the Coming One; and they will have blessed part in His kingdom (Rev. 20), when they too shall judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). The like distinction from “we” may be seen at the end in Heb. 11:39, 40; and it is remarkable, as this instance proves, that they are shown not as they will be but as they are, “to the spirits of just made perfect.” They will not be in the separate state when “that day” is come; they will be raised from among the dead at the presence of Christ.

Next we read “and to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant.” This is the pledge of the enduring mercy which awaits the two houses of Israel. Of this all the ancient revelation speaks fully, the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets; so that there is the less need of now dwelling on it particularly, even if the Gospels and the

Acts, and the Epistles and the Revelation did not also confirm it. It is only necessary to say here that “new” means “fresh” or “recent,” a quite different word and thought from the usual “new” covenant, which means covenant on a new principle, not letter but spirit, not man’s responsibility as at Sinai but God’s grace in Christ. Here the added comfort is given that when in days to come Jehovah makes the new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, when He will put His law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and be their God and they His people, with other blessed and abiding consequences, it will also be as “fresh” as when the blood was shed by which the great Mediator founded it on His death before God. The Christian Hebrews had come to Jesus its Mediator, not yet to its actual connection and establishment with Israel, but to Him who has done all for this purpose in due time.

But the prospect makes the way for another consequent blessing: “And to blood of sprinkling speaking better than Abel.” If a new covenant points to Israel put under new and sure and everlasting covenant mercy in virtue of Jehovah-Messiah, the voice of the blood of sprinkling does not cry for vengeance and curse as Abel’s did (Gen. 4:10-12); it speaks of reconciliation for the earth (and indeed all things) assured by that blood which is alone precious and efficacious with God. It is clear, however, that this, however truly a guarantee, is like others we have seen, not yet in actual accomplishment; if we have come to them in hope, yea in full assurance of hope, we do not yet see them, and so with patience wait for them all, surely to be manifest in the day we see approaching.

It could not be, save by the power of faith, that Hebrews would fail to boast of the early wonders of Israel, and recall with pride the fervent words of Moses: “What nation is there so great, that hath God so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is in all that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors according to all that Jehovah your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?” (Deut. 4)

Yet the force of Christianity shows itself in lifting believing Jews no less than Gentiles, above all that was or can be seen on earth, to the incomparably higher glories of Christ on the right hand of the Majesty on high revealed now to our faith. Such is the keynote of the Epistle before us. And as the Gentile enamoured of philosophy needed to be delivered from his vain dreams, we may apply to the Jew what the apostle said to the Corinthians in his Second Epistle (2 Cor. 3:10), “For even that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect on account of the glory, that surpasseth,” not to speak of its abiding in glory, instead of being done away in Christ as the Mosaic economy is.

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not when they refused him that divinely warned on earth, much more [shall not] we that turn away from him that [doth] from [the] heavens; whose voice then

shook the earth, but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once will I cause to quake not only the earth but also heaven. Now the Yet once signifieth the removing of the things shaken as having been made, that the things not shaken may remain. Wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken, have grace (or, thankfulness) whereby let us serve God acceptably with godly fear and dread. For our God [is] a consuming fire" (verses 25-29).

The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is regarded as speaking in the N.T., and speaking from the heavens. So it is in this Epistle, Heb. 1:2: God has spoken to us in a Son, not merely in the prophets. The person and the place give His speaking the highest authority and immeasurable value; especially as it is on the ground of that eternal redemption, and the purification of sins made by Himself before He set Himself down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hence the danger of refusing Him that speaks. It is not excusing ourselves because of our inability to meet divine requirements as in the law. Now "the will of God" is done by the Lord Jesus, the Son — done so perfectly in His death as a sacrifice that God is absolutely glorified; by which will we who believe have been sanctified through the offering of His body once for all — nay more, perfected continuously (εἰς τὸ διηνεκές), without a break. Man, weak and guilty man, is excluded from this immense doing, this infinite suffering. It is God acting for His own glory in His Son, that the believer might be perfectly blessed. He is therefore called, in the sense and confession of his evil, to bow to God in His grace, who, having thus wrought His will, speaks that man may hear and live, may believe and be saved, blessed now and evermore.

Those who trust their own thoughts and feelings do refuse Him that speaketh. They strive to find a reason in themselves or in the nature of things; and they strive in vain, for no answer can man or nature give why unclean and depraved man should be thence taken up for sharing the portion of the saints in light, and entering boldly even now into the holy of holies. They believe not Him that speaks: they credit not the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. The reason is not in man, still less in nature, but in the grace of God who has brought a new and everlasting glory to Himself by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Thus can He not only afford righteously to save all that believe, but to find His joy in saving the most unworthy, yet only on their heeding Him that speaks, His Son. See that ye refuse Him not!

Just because it is God coming forth in His Son to do the work, after man (tried in every way with the utmost patience on God's part) had failed in all, it is fatal for ever to refuse to hear Him and bow. The law was the grandest possible experiment for testing on the score of duty to God and man; and the cross of Christ ended it by man's greatest sin against both God and man. But that very cross saw God's will done for ever by Him whose death completed and closed all sacrifice for our sins before God. It was Christ's work: it was God's will; and the Holy Spirit testifies its efficacy for ever. Thereby is remission of our sins; and where this is, there is no longer an offering for sin. What is a bloodless sacrifice but a mockery and worse?

Hence if you refuse Him that speaks, you have nothing but your sins now and the wrath to come. The Jews had in earthly sacrifice no remission, only a calling to mind of sins. An unbloody sacrifice is a nullity and no better

than Cain’s, and now that Christ has died for sins, still more presumptuous and guilty. And all other blood is incapable of taking away sins. Christ, once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear to those that look for Him the second time apart from sin for salvation. For such He will have no more to do with sin, having ended that question by His sacrifice the first time. The second time He will appear to His people for salvation, when their bodies will be saved as their souls are now. But if you refuse Him, destruction awaits you, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might not annihilation which is but an ungodly dream of perdition. And is it not just?

“For if they escaped not when they refused him that divinely warned on earth, much more shall not we that turn away from him that [doth] from heavens; whose voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once will I cause to quake not only the earth but also the heaven.” How plain, conclusive, and overwhelming! It was wicked to refuse the divine warning of the law; it is incomparably worse to turn away from Him that speaks from heaven. For He speaks, not of the yoke which neither the fathers nor the children were able to bear, nor yet of their rebellious restiveness under it, but of redemption through His own blood who was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities, of peace already made through the blood of His cross, who sits at God’s right hand in witness of full acceptance for all who believe. To turn away from His voice is the gravest sin and the surest ruin.

Do you ask a proof? His voice then shook the earth when the law was given; for the Son was ever the One that

spoke and acted even of old, no less God and the one Jehovah than the Father. And soon His voice will be heard again still more tremendously. Then Israel heard, by-and-by every creature must hear. For yet once, saith He, will I cause to quake not only the earth but also the heaven. Yet such is the efficiency of His work that for those who believe it is a" promise." What can harm those that are His own? If God. be for us, who is against us? He who has not even spared His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who shall lay accusation against God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather was also raised up, that is also at God's right hand, that also intercedeth for us: who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Hence what is an awful menace to unbelievers is a promise to faith. Even the quaking of the universe "he hath promised"; it is no threat to us, for His love will rest on us then as much as ever, and we shall peacefully enter into all that is for His glory. From other Scriptures we know that we shall be then with Christ on high, but the words may be a special comfort to the godly Jews who follow, as we have shown elsewhere.

"Now the Yet once signifieth the removal of the things shaken as having been made, that the things not shaken may remain." It is only creation that passes away under His rebuke, that the new creation may alone stand. "For he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." And no words are more true or faithful. They will surely be verified in their season. But the wonder of the Christian is that this is in principle true of him even now; not a promise merely but a fact, no doubt spiritual but only for this cause the more real and abiding and

unchangeable. For if anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation. And this is a great advance on an O.T. saint who was begotten of God, born anew, a blessed and divinely given subjective reality. But we have not this only but our part in the objective reality. We are in Christ risen, the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead. It is true of every Christian; if anyone be in Christ, a Dew creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new: and all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5).

Hence we look as a promise for the removal of the things made, of this creation, that the things not shaken may remain, God's purpose is to head up all things in Christ, to reconcile all things to Himself; but He has reconciled us already in the body of His flesh, yet not through incarnation but through His death. Compare Eph. 1; Col. 1; Heb. 2. We died too with Christ, and reckon ourselves therefore dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. The removal of the things shaken, of the things not in Christ, awakens no terror but rather satisfaction; and we exult in the glory of God.

"Therefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken, have grace (or, thankfulness), whereby let us serve God acceptably with godly fear and dread. For our God is a consuming fire." See the beautiful picture of this in Rev. 4, where the glorified elders are wholly unmoved by the lightnings and thunders and voices which proceed out of the throne; but when the living creatures render glory to Him that sits on it, they are all activity, leave their thrones, fall before Him, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O our Lord and our God. And this is revealed to act on our souls now. For we are qualified already, true worshippers in the hour that

now is to worship in Spirit and truth. By grace we fear yet love Him, and would serve Him. Undoubtedly “our” God is a consuming fire; notwithstanding is He our Father who loves us perfectly. And He loves us equally as “God.” None the less does He hate sin, as He has proved in the cross of Christ; and He has given us a nature that hates sin, even Christ who lives in us as He died for us. Nothing more opposed to truth than making grace a veil or excuse for sin, as every believer confesses. Therefore says the apostle to the saints in Rome, “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under law but under grace.” If we were under law, it is powerless for holiness, and can only condemn, being a ministry of death. Christ is the rule of life working on and in us by the Holy Spirit.

46 “Lord” here means Jehovah, and therefore excludes the article in Greek.

47 εἰς A D K L P and some 50 cursives (the Vat. B. and Rescript of Paris, C, failing); εἰ has but some cursives, Euthal-Cod. and Theophylact, all the ancient Vv, and Ff. being adverse.

48 In A P, etc.,

ἐστὶν is not expressed.

49 A few very ancient witnesses give “the” many: so in Mark 6:2; Mark 9:26.

50 The best and most ancient witnesses omit

ὄρει here, which is understood from verse 22, where the positive object is found. But Mr. T. S. Green goes so far as to give up the contrast of the two mountains, and has, “You have come to a fire touched,” etc.

Hebrews 13

Next follow exhortations of a practical kind for holy brethren of a heavenly calling on the earth. And first the word is, “Let brotherly affection abide” (verse 1). This is very needful in the long run; and the Epistle was among not the early but the latest ones. It was easy enough in the glow of first love, and was strengthened instead of checked by prevalent persecutions for the sake of the faith. But when these trials do not so much press, the very nearness of the saints to each other, as God’s family here below, exposes them to danger. For the less grace souls have personally for daily difficulties, the more they expect from others, and the harsher the judgments they hastily form. In the world there is distance kept up by mutual consent, and reserve is cultivated as to the affairs of one another, without which things could scarcely go on decently for any space; but the closeness of spiritual relationship, where it;.S loyally felt and in lively exercise, as it was and ought ever to be, soon brings to light self-will and worldliness at work, unless there be a walking according to the light into which we are brought in Christ. God is love; and he that abides in love abides in God, and God in him. When this fails in the practice of the saint, brotherly affection will ere long give way, and hasty speech engender variance, or suspicion cloud the light of love. In Heb. 6:10 the love they had shown to His name was recorded in having ministered and still ministering to the saints. In Heb. 10:34 we see how it wrought in deep trials and afflictions. Here the word is for the continuance of brotherly affection. There is much to try such love.

The verses that immediately follow give the direction that was more particularly needed. “Forget not hospitality; for by it some unawares entertained angels. Remember the prisoners, as bound with [them], the ill-treated, as being yourselves also in a body” (verses 2, 3). To entertain strangers is a happy form of exercising brotherly kindness. Yet is it especially liable to be imposed on, were it not that the Lord’s over-ruling eye is over all, and He permits nothing that does not work for good to those that love God. The danger for the believer is that he should be vexed at advantage taken, and lest he should slacken in consequence. But if men abuse kindness thus, the Lord accepts the good and forgets it not. The encouragement assigned is that some, as Abraham and Lot of old, entertained angels unawares. To receive God’s children now is assuredly no less honour in His eyes. Another mode of brotherly kindness is in active remembrance of those who, as early Christians, had to bear the stigma of public bonds or prison. If we failed to realise the uncomeliness of holding aloof from brethren thus put to shame, the affecting reference of the apostle to Onesiphorus in his own case at Rome, which we find in 2 Tim. 1 and with less detail elsewhere, may give a just sense of its sweet seasonableness and value before the Lord. Then again how many are the “ill-treated” though not in a prison! Let us not forget such, as being ourselves also in a body. 51 Compare Heb. 10:32-34.

A new topic comes before us in verse 4: “[Let,] marriage [be] honourable in all things and the bed [be] undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” Here the Jewish Christian is called to stand the more on his guard, as the law allowed a latitude which the Lord

showed to be far from God's mind. The A.V. is faulty in two respects. It is not a mere affirmative sentence stamping the relationship with dignity, but an exhortation in the imperative calling us to carry it on worthily, and to guard it from all taint of unchastity or impureness. And we are bid to set it in honour, not in this respect or in that, but "in all things." Thus it is in no way a certificate of respectability which all people possess because they are in wedlock, but a solemn charge to married saints that, their use of the relationship be thus pleasing to the Lord in every detail. To say it is honourable "in all men" overlooks, if it does not destroy, the force of the scripture for the Christian's conscience. and this is the more evident as we hear next that God will judge every violation of its sanctity whether in neglect or in misuse.

Then comes the call, "Let your course of life be free of avarice, contented with things present. For he hath said, I will in no wise leave thee, no, nor at all forsake thee; so that we say confidently, Jehovah [is] my helper, land] I will not fear: what shall man do to me?" (verses 5, 6.) Avarice, sordid and unworthy of moral men, is peculiarly beneath those called to follow Christ in faith and love, with their eyes opened to their better and enduring substance where Christ is. Discontent with things is natural to unbelievers. It is good and due that we confide in His word to one, although no less meant for all His own. The vulgar text falls far below the impressive promise and challenge the O.T. furnished: and God as a Father only gives it more force.

The hearts of the brethren are next recalled to their departed guides, who, as they had been remarkable for

their faith, had closed their course faithfully to the Lord's praise.

"Be mindful of your leaders, who were such as spoke to you the word of God and, considering the issue of their course, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday and today and for ever. By teachings various and strange be not carried away; for [it is] good that the heart be established with grace, not meats; in which those that walked were not profited" (verses 7-9).

It is well that we should distinguish in our tongue what the Holy Spirit had distinguished in verses 3, 7: the former (compare Heb. 2:6) is practical remembrance of need, trial, and suffering; the latter is calling to mind those apt to be forgotten who had passed away. Hence the text of the A.V. is not in accordance with the truth; nor is the margin though more literal. But in this case we must say were, not "are," your guides, for their course was closed, as the verse itself intimates. They had been "leading" men among the brethren like Judas Barsabbas and Silas (Acts 15:22), whether elders or not, for those so named had a larger and higher sphere than a local charge. And the saints are exhorted to hold them in honoured memory; as the clause that follows characterises them as having spoken to them the word of God, not the bare fact that they had so spoken in their day. It is probable that some of their "leaders" had the rule among the saints; but this is not the force of the word here employed, which is of a more general import, and may not have been other than prominence in teaching and exhortation.

There is another word it is well to observe (

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στάμενοι) of similar import, as we may see in Rom. 12:8, 1 Thess. 5:12, which these scriptures show not to have been restricted to elders, though of course applicable to the exercises of their office. It means “presiding,” and has its importance in its due place. But the great present value, as in the past, is that it depended on the spiritual strength which God supplies, and not on official position to which an apostle or an apostolic delegate had appointed: a thing also to be fully owned where the fact was so, as Scripture clearly proves. However this may have been, they had been their leaders, and the brethren are told, considering the issue of their course of life (in old English “their conversation”), to imitate their faith. Some among the Hebrew confessors were in danger of drawing back, as others seem to have actually done. There had been in earlier days a noble stand and severe endurance for it; and here they are exhorted to that which shone in departed guides, some at any rate of whom, it would appear, had resisted to blood.

But a far higher object follows: the great Sufferer, He of all glory who always abides. “Jesus Christ [is] yesterday and today the same, and for ever (unto the ages).” Such is the true meaning. There is no real ground for viewing it in apposition with “the end (or, issue) of the conversation” that precedes, which not only violates grammar but destroys the bearing of both clauses. It does beautifully introduce Him who not only remains alive again for evermore, but changes not. It is the creature’s weakness to change. And of all creatures none more given to change than man, though he be head of all and endowed beyond all on earth; yet most changeable, like a reed bending to every wind through his will and his passions. But here we have real man,

and tried as none other ever was, yet the Unchanging One, as indeed He was and is God no less really. What a stay for our faith! For we who believe on Him have still the fallen nature; and who so competent as He to deliver us from our liability to swerve from the good, holy, and true into some snare of the enemy! To look to Him, depend on Him, delight our souls in Him, follow Him, is an immense safeguard, given of grace to this end; and He knows how to keep and hold the least stedfast of saints that wait on Him. Truly He is the rock that never moves, to sustain such as without Him must be the sport of wind and wave.

Of all men the Hebrews had shown themselves of old the most ready to adopt the strange and false gods of the nations. So their own prophets reproached them with a folly beyond example; yet were they the only people favoured with the living God, Jehovah of Hosts, deigning to be their God. But they rebelled against Him, people, priests, and kings, till there was no remedy; and except He had left them a very small remnant, they had been as Sodom and like Gomorrah. None but the Messiah could meet their desperate case, when they had become Lo-ammi, and even He only by the sacrifice of Himself when they had rejected and crucified Him. But now He was risen from the dead and glorified, crowned with glory and honour, and all things put in subjection under His feet, as David sung in spirit. True, now we see not yet all things put under Him. But we behold Himself exalted on high, the pledge of all that will surely be displayed at His appearing. To this blessed object of faith and hope are the eyes of these believing sons directed, that they might cleave to Him with purpose of heart, as their fathers never did, through unbelief no more tossed to

and fro. “Be not carried about by various and strange doctrines.” Such is the connection of thought, such the preservation in fact from that great danger. By this all saints may be blessed. “For it is good that the heart be established with grace not with meats,” however much the lovers of tradition discuss and commend them, “in which those that walked were not profited.” How indeed could it be? Meats perish in the using, as those do who look not to the Highest. He is now dealing in nothing but sovereign grace, that the weakest may be sustained, and that the most wicked be saved through Christ and His redemption.

The Holy Spirit is not content with repudiating various and strange teachings, and such ordinances of flesh as He had already shown to characterise an imperfect system and a provisional time. (Heb. 9:9, 10) when the way into the sanctuary had not yet been made manifest. He affirms for the Christian the positive realities which the Jews might have thought non-existent. So He had proved throughout the Epistle. What Judaism had in form and shadow, in an earthly measure, those who are Christ’s even now possess as heavenly truth in unfailing and abiding virtue, while ample scope was still left for the power of hope. The purification of sins was already made (Heb. 1:3), the great salvation confirmed unto us by most ample and excellent witness, God Himself deigning to testify in the powers of the Spirit (Heb. 2:3, 4). He even declares that, though we see not yet all things subjected to Jesus, the Son of man, as we surely expect, we do behold Himself, because of the suffering of death too, crowned with glory and honour (Heb. 2:8, 9). We are invited to consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus indeed (Heb. 3:1), but Jesus

already shown to be unique, Son of God and Son of man (Heb. 1, 2), passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:14), a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:10).

O the folly, if we have Him, of hankering after a blasphemer like Caiaphas, or a Sadducean persecutor like Ananias. Nay, was there to be ever so ideal an heir of Aaron, “such a high priest became us” (said He, Heb. 7:26), “holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens.” For He has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens, as befits the surpassing glory of His person and His office, thus proved incontestably superior to Aaron’s at his brightest; as He is become surety of a better covenant, which the prophets declared was to supersede the first and faulty one (Heb. 8:13) of which the Jews boasted. Now only was the work of God done by the Son, and witnessed by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10), but also God provided for us some better thing (Heb. 11:40). So He speaks now:-

“We have an altar of which they, have no right, to eat who serve the tabernacle.” So run the words, not only because the Epistle ever looks at the wilderness way and its accompaniments, but because they were to know that “these great buildings” had no longer glory but shame, and that shortly should be left not one stone upon another. What altar of copper or gold can compare with Him through whom we draw near to God and approach boldly even unto His throne of grace?

Let them understand better the figures of the true. “For the bodies of the beasts, whose blood is brought for sin into the holies by the high priest, are burned without the camp.” It is only in Christianity that the two-fold truth is

realised; in Judaism. it was unknown, still less enjoyed. The two extremes meet in the true sin-offering, which points to the blood which fits for the holiest, and to the body burnt in the place of rejection outside. The Christian has access into the sanctuary, but along with this he shares the place of scorn here below. So it was with the Master and Lord. “Wherefore also Jesus, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered without the gate.” Here is not type only but fact, the ground of the exhortation so needed then by the Jewish confessors, so needed at all times by the Christian: way we not add more urgently now, when men revive Jewish elements in that disguise?

Therefore let us go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach; for we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the coming one” (verse 14). We are not of the world, as our Lord was not; and as He never sought its ease or honour, but accepted its shame, so are we called to follow His steps “outside the camp,” the scene of religious respectability; as Heb. 10:19, etc., sets forth our boldness to enter the holies by the blood of Jesus. We are now constituted meet to draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. The Jewish system by its nature not only offered no ‘such privilege but denied it to all, even to the high priest who could approach but once a year its figure, and then with awful fear lest death should avenge any failure on his part. It was the then via media.

And where are God’s children now as to all this? Are they not in general, as far from availing themselves in practical ways of approach to the holies, as they run after man’s mind and the world’s honours? In fact, as in doctrine, the two things are closely tied together. And as

grace makes us first free of the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus, we are the better strengthened next to obey the call to go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.

Soon the unbelieving or half-believing Jew had to learn that here he had no abiding city. But this should be ever true to a Christian's faith, if he dwelt in Rome or in London, as then in Jerusalem. Like Abraham we look for the city which rests not on sand but "hath the foundations." But it is "to come," and will never be built of human hands, let men vaunt as they may. Its architect and maker is God; and Christ has prepared us for it. "Through him therefore let us offer sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, fruit of lips making confession to his name. But of doing good and of communicating be not forgetful, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (verses 15, 16).

However serious our souls may well be, as we justly estimate the enmity of the world to God, His grace, truth, word, and ways, as well as our own danger of compromise or of sin in any form, we are exhorted to offer sacrifice of praise continually to Him. It is through Christ. This prepares and accounts for it. For He is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever; and our blessing through Him is as complete as it is everlasting: salvation (Heb. 5), redemption (Heb. 9), inheritance (Heb. 9), and covenant (Heb. 13), all everlasting. No wonder we are called to praise God, not as Jews now and then, but "continually." So in 1 Thess. 5:18 the apostle bids us "in every thine, give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning, you." Here it is appropriately said to be a sacrifice of praise which we offer to God continually. Is it, can it be so, where souls

are under law? Are we not under grace? It is making confession to His name, and in no way our own righteousness any more than a form. But the Holy Spirit carefully reminds “of doing good and communicating” (i.e. of our substance to others in need). It is a real exercise of love and in faith, that it be a sacrifice, if of a lower sort than praise to God. “Forget not”; for there was danger of overlooking. These acts were also acceptable: “with such sacrifices God is well pleased,” although those of praise have the higher place.

In verse 17 it is no question of remembering the dead leaders (as in verse 7), but of the attitude which becomes the saints to their living guides. And this is shown by an obedient and submissive spirit.

“Obey your leaders and submit, for they watch for your souls as having to render an account; that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for this [would be] unprofitable for you. Pray, for us; for we are persuaded52 that we have a good conscience, desiring in all things to behave well. And I more abundantly beseech you to do this that I may more quickly be restored to you” (verses 17, 18).

Reaction from new truth is a danger at one time, and at another a return to old ways when the new become irksome. So these Christian Jews are exhorted to that which is a constant duty for us no less than for them. Self-will increasingly characterises this present evil age; and self-will is always sin. Elsewhere, as in Rom. 12, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, those called to preside or take the lead, elders or not, are exhorted how to fulfil their work in the Lord. Here, as in 1 Cor. 16, and 1 Thess. 5, the saints are reminded of what God looks for on their part.

Scripture sanctions neither assertion of human right nor arbitrary claim of divine authority in the church of God. All are bound to serve, all responsible to obey the Lord who has made His will sure and plain in the written word. But there is such a thing as spiritual wisdom, and experience which grace forms by the word of righteousness; there is practical power which faith gives by the action of, the Holy Spirit, which is eminently serviceable to those less exercised in discerning the path of Christ Hence as one must feel in the intricacies which so frequently beset the saints in such a world as this, and with a nature on which the enemy can readily act through present things, there is ample room for constant need of godly counsel, serious admonition, or even sharp rebuke: and as to all this the word is “obey your leaders and submit.” How often a real guide can point out what a perplexed saint saw not before it was set before him, but, when so set, at once perceives to be of God! For if there be a word of wisdom given to the one through the Spirit, the same Spirit dwelling in the other appreciates the true and the right, through the grace of Christ which sets independence aside as well as worldly lust or any other evil thing. Thus is the Lord honoured in the chiefs no less than in those who submit to them. Sacerdotal claim is now excluded; and lawlessness is judged as hateful to God. Christ Himself led the way here below in this path of invariable and unswerving obedience; and those that guide will only guide aright if walking in the revealed ways of God which they urge on others; as these are only blessed as they walk in obedience and submission, instead of a vain clamour for their own rights, which if realised would be Satan’s slavery. We are, every one of us, bondsmen of the Lord Jesus.

But it is well to note that the Vulgate has fallen into the perversion, so natural to the official mind, that the guides will have to give an account of the souls under their supervision. Such is the strange reading of the Alexandrian MS. followed by Lachmann in his Greek Testament of 1831. Tischendorf who noticed this should have seen that L. corrected the error in his larger ed. of 1840-50. Certainly there is no excuse for anyone failing to recognise the overwhelming testimony in favour of the ancient copies as well as of the Received Text, which speak of the guides exercising their wakeful care on behalf of the souls of the saints, as having to render an account. But this means not of other men's souls, but of their own conduct in relation to them. For each shall bear his own burden; and whatever, or whoever, comes between the conscience and God is of the enemy. Herein Romanism is the chief but far from the only offender in availing itself of a transparent error, and pursuing its most evil consequences. As the saints are shown the solemn responsibility of their leaders, they are told to cultivate a gracious readiness to obey and submit, that the guides might do their watchful work with joy, and not with groans over their refractoriness, which would be profitless for the saints. Compare for the other side 1 John 2:28, and 2 John 8 and for this side 3 John 4.

There is a fine link of connection in the request of the next verse: "Pray for us; for we are persuaded that we have a good conscience," etc. How many more ask prayer because their conscience is bad! But the inspired writer could ask that the hearts of his brethren might plead with God for sustainment in his work, as the Spirit was leading him on without the sad need of getting morally restored from this or that evil which burdened

him. For the fact is that of all saints none more need prayer — their own and of others — than such as are very prominent and active in the Lord's work. Habitually occupied with preaching and teaching others, how great the danger is of going on with a conscience not good about themselves! And what can more decidedly defile or harden? The apostle, in writing to his brethren, does all the more ask their prayers, because he exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men, as he could say before the governor Felix and the high priest Ananias, both of them grievously and notoriously far different in this respect.

There is added an appeal to their affection. "But I more abundantly beseech you to do this, that I may be more quickly restored to you" (compare Philem. 22). It is beautiful and cheering to know that he counted on the love of the saints in the evil day, and that their prayers were so highly valued as efficacious with God.

The closing prayer is as worthy of this great Epistle as it corresponds with its character.

"Now the God of peace that brought up from [the] dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, in [virtue of] blood of an eternal covenant,, perfect you in every good work to the doing of his will, doing in you what is well pleasing before him through Jesus Christ; to whom [be] the glory, for the ages of ages. Amen" (verses 20, 21). There is no blessing of the gospel, no need of the unbeliever, more characteristic than peace. As to the Roman saints peace with God was assured, so here to the believing Jews as well as the believing Greeks of Philippi, God is proclaimed as the God of peace. The peace of God has its suited limits; the God of peace is

illimitable. The departure of some disheartened others. Ere long, city and temple would be destroyed. But wants, difficulties, and dangers only furnish Him the occasion to bring His children through, purged of earthly associations and more than conquerors. The proof and pledge they see in our Lord Jesus, whom God brought up from the dead, not only the “good” and “chief” but “the great Shepherd of the sheep,” whose blood is of no temporary covenant but of an eternal, avails not only for the present redemption and heavenly nearness of those who believe, but as their sure title to be similarly brought up from death at His coming.

Nothing can move such a Saviour, standing, and hope. The “better thing” we possess rests on the God of peace and a Shepherd so great that those of Israel are utterly small and weak in comparison. And God is no otiose or capricious being such as pagans feigned, but active unceasingly according to the perfect and perfecting work of His Son. He lends an ear to His own in their perilous pilgrimage, and is ready to fully adjust them in ever good work to the doing of His will, even as Christ has shown us the example unfalteringly. Thus only can be what is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ; as He is the One who does all the good in His saints who deny self and depend on Him by faith. To Him then be the glory for ever and ever, Amen. For an end so holy, what can others, what can self do? “There is none good but One, God.” And the Son is the way to the Father, the truth, and the life. So the Holy Spirit works in glorifying Him, whom the Father will have all to honour even as they honour the Father. Thus only is His will done in principle and in detail.

“Now I exhort you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation; for also in few words have I written to you. Know that our brother Timothy hath been set at liberty, with whom if he come soon, I will see you. Salute all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy salute you. Grace [be] with you all, Amen” (verses 22-25).

The Epistle as a whole abounds in exhortation, based as ever on the truth of Christ, His work, and His offices, drawn from the. O.T. with a skill and power and simplicity which the Holy Spirit alone could give the inspired vessel; yet vast and profound and far-reaching as the result is, in what few words comparatively has all been conveyed! What scope for others to enlarge and enforce in their exhortations! and without controversy how subversive of all that Rabbinism loves to hear, not only hiding the waste to which their unbelief has reduced “the pleasant land,” but shutting out from their disciples the more than fulfilment of their highest aspirations in Him, who as concerning flesh came of Judah and of David’s lineage doubly, but is infinitely more, for He is over all, God blessed for ever, Amen.

The Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets are seen in a N.T. setting, self-evidently intended to be so understood when the due time came, which also saw the blotting out even of the returned remnant, and most righteously; for had they not hated and rejected their own Messiah? Marvellous is the way in which all the unfolding of His person and work and offices is turned to practical profit in detail; so that it is with the best right styled “the word of exhortation,” about to yield unfailing subjects and varied appeals for the ministry of His servants, whose eye is simple to His glory, whose heart appreciates His grace, whose faith in the crucified Christ follows Him on

high and approaches God in the holiest. And this is Christianity, the present living truth. with its heavenly and everlasting issues. By-and-by a remnant in the latter day shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah; and the Lord Jehovah too shall say to the dry bones in the open valley, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. Yes, they shall surely live, those dry bones of Israel in that day, stand up an exceeding great army, and be placed in their own land. Yea more, the twelve tribes shall be one in Jehovah's hand, one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all; and that king the trite Beloved, great David's greater Son. and there shall they dwell for ever, and the Beloved, Jehovah's Servant, their prince for ever. This will be His kingdom, for His world-kingdom is not yet come but will assuredly. But those who now share His rejection and wait for heavenly glory have "the better thing."

The reference to Timothy suits the apostle Paul fully, while the omission of his own name is quite intelligible, as writing outside his province of the uncircumcision, yet just the expression of his heart always toward his brethren after the flesh, and characterised by the knowledge of Christ dead, risen, and ascended as became him beyond other men. The allusion in 2 Peter 3 is decisive that the apostle Paul wrote an Epistle to the believers of the circumcision, to whom Peter addressed both his Epistles. That letter of Paul can only be the Epistle to the Hebrews, unless we suppose God allowed such a unique document to perish and someone else to do that work over again for a permanent place in the canon of scripture. Only speculative rationalism could receive suppositions so harsh, capricious, and unworthy;

but those who do not give its true value to God’s word as it is are proverbially credulous of fancies such as these.

No doubt the style differs strikingly; but even men of genius only have often shown themselves equal to some such difference in their works. But here all concurred to give a new and deep character, if indeed the apostle Paul was the one employed by the Holy Spirit for this great Epistle to the saints in Jerusalem, in view of the impending catastrophe, as well as their defective apprehensions which exposed them to such serious danger spiritually. We can understand how this and more must call out his heart who reciprocated God’s mingled pain and pity over Israel, as well as the grief of the Spirit over their comparative insensibility to the superiority of their Christian privileges, and to the glory of Christ in the heavens above any Davidical hopes, bright as they surely are. Who can wonder that duly weighs all this, that a final divine message from one who so tenderly loved them, and who felt for the honour of Christ in person, work, and office, faintly seen by true yet feeble saints, should engage his heart profoundly, and give scope, elevation, and power to his language in a way as uncommon as the occasion which drew it forth?

No doubt the absence of the writer’s name is quite sufficient to show that God is here pointing to the importance of the teaching rather than to the teacher. And the blessedness of the truth, if the most prejudiced of the Hebrew Christians heard to the end, would so disarm him of such unworthy feelings that he could not but own that he had never realised the gospel and Christ Himself and his Christian standing as he did now. Thus he would be fitted, and enabled to thank God heartily for what the apostle of uncircumcision wrote to them of

circumcision. The sore point would be thoroughly healed; and as faith and hope were strengthened, love would prevail to the praise of grace.

It is probable enough that the Epistle was written in Rome. But if so, we may admire the wisdom that withheld any such mention to swell the pride of a later day. The saints there had a great and suited Epistle written to them; and well had it been if the truth conveyed had ever been their confession in deed and in word. But the silence here precluded a boast of the emptiest kind in Rome's fall from the truth. But from the end of verse 24 it would appear that saints from Italy, not of Rome only, were with the writer when and where he wrote. They would be sure to flock round him before his departure; and he would rejoice to communicate the salutation of love to Jews, no longer despised but beloved in the Lord, from such a centre of the world's pride and selfishness.

The greeting here desired embraces "all your leaders and all the saints." This was emphatically called for then, but seasonable always. How many are apt to be narrow, if not alienated! Not so was his heart who wrote, "Grace be with you all, Amen."

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51 The notion that this refers, not to the earthen vessel but to Christ's body, the church, is the more untenable, as this relationship is never once touched in the Epistle.

52 The common reading

πεποίθαμεν, followed by the Vulgate, Armenian, the A.V., etc., has numerous support, but of inferior antiquity and

weight as compared with πειθόμεθα which is more suited to a subjective state.