THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

VERSE 6.

In the sixth verse of this Chapter we have another remarkable star in the constellation of Old Testament quotations. The verse is as follows, in our English Authorized Version:—*And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

There is, however, in this rendering a little obscuration of the light of the Original. Our Translators—following in the wake of the Geneva Version, Tyndale, and Luther—regarded the adverb *again* as qualifying *he saith*, and as thus, in consecutive relation to the *again* of the preceding verse, numbering off an additional item of Old Testament citation. This method of construing the adverb dates from a period long anterior to Luther's version. The author of the Syriac-Peshito had approved of it. Erasmus too, just a little before the period of Luther's literary activity, approved of it, and so did Calvin and Beza. In modern times Bleek decided for it; and Ebrard and Reuss acquiesce in his decision.

It is however a violent construction, postulating an awkward transposition of the adverb,—a transposition which should not be assumed unless in a case of clear exegetical necessity. No such extremity confronts us here. And hence it is gratifying to find that the majority of the latest interpreters,—inclusive of Klee, de Wette, Tholuck, Von Hofmann, Delitzsch, Lünemann, Alford, Bisping, Riehm, Kurtz, Moll, Hingenfeld,—have swung back from the

interpretation that too long lorded it in the schools. They are agreed in restoring the adverb to its natural position—"And when *he bringeth in again* the first-begotten into the world."

But even with this restoration of the adverb *again* to its proper place, the expression of which it forms a part, and which is intended to be introductory to the Old Testament citation, has not got justice done it, either by Luther or in our English Version. The verb is not in the indicative of the present tense, *he bringeth in.* It is in the subjunctive of the second aorist, and corresponds to the Latin future-perfect (the *futurum exactum*), and means *he shall have brought in.* The expression transports us into a still future period in the administration of the affairs of the kingdom of God. But in transporting us thither, it sets us down, not at the commencement of the event referred to, but at its consummation, so that we look back on it as completed:—"When God *shall have brought in again* the first-begotten into the world."

The reference is—as Gregory of Nyssa among the Fathers perceived, and Ribera of Spain, and Cameron of Scotland and Saumur, together with the modern expositors already specified—to the second advent of our Lord,—that advent when "he shall appear without sin unto salvation," and take to Himself his great name and reign; when, consequently, our earth—the "inheritance of the meek" (Psa. xxxvii. 11; Matt. v. 5)—shall be "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. iii. 13).

Some critics indeed, such as Olshausen and

Ebrard, object to this, the only unconstrained interpretation of the passage, that there has been no mention made, in what goes before, of a first advent of the Messiah. And hence, as they argue, there would be an incongruity in here making reference, in a formally numerical manner, to his second coming. This objection, however, is of very light weight. For although the phrase *first advent*, or rather *first introduction* or *in-bringing*, is not employed by the Letter-writer, yet the thing signified by the phrase is expressly particularized. When the Father—as we read in the first Old Testament passage adduced—said to the Son, *I have this day begotten thee*, the saying really means, *I have this day introduced thee, as my Son, into the world.* And hence it is that the Apostle Paul regarded the declaration as tantamount to *a promise that God would raise up Jesus among men*, or *introduce Him into the world* (Acts xiii. 32, 33).

It will be noticed that this second advent of our Lord is ascribed by the writer to the agency of the Father. It is He who, in relation to some subsequent event, *shall have brought in again the first-begotten into the humanly-inhabited world* (τὴν οἰκουμένην). It is a representation harmonious with the whole scope of Scripture,—for in all the Divine dispensations, creative, redemptive, legislative, administrative, the Father has precedence, and is "greater than the Son" (John xiv. 28). It is He who takes the initiative. He sent the prophets. He sends the Son. He gives "commandment." And it is He from whom, in the case of 'the great rebellion,' proffers of conciliation emanate, and to

whom propitiation—whatever that may really be—is rendered.

The time in the future, when the re-introduction of the first-begotten shall take place, is left indeterminate. There is a nicety to this effect in the original phraseology (ὅταν in place of ὅτε), which is not reproduced in our Authorized Version. The translation should run thus—"And *whenever* he shall have brought in again the first-begotten into the world."

The name given to our Lord deserves consideration,—*the first-begotten*, or better, *the first-born*. So the term is rendered in all the other passages in which it occurs in the New Testament, with the exception of Rev. i. 5, where it should have received the same translation. The corresponding term in Hebrew is never rendered *first-begotten*. Once it is translated *eldest;* once or twice, *eldest son*. Several times, when applied to the lower animals, it is rendered *firstling*. But in all other cases—and they amount to scores—it is translated *first-born*.

Why is our Lord so designated? The term replaces the word *son*, which is employed in the preceding context, and which might have been repeated here. But the writer was an orator, whose mind was teeming with exuberance of recollections and fresh thoughts. He delighted in variety; and hence the variation. The substituted term, in replacing the simpler word, represents the same idea, *with an addition*.

The addition is the prerogative of *primogeniture*. It is a prerogative that postulates that there either

are or may be other "sons of God." But it claims for our Lord that He is "before all," and that thus He is, and ever will be, the First, the Foremost.

In the primary import of the term *first-born*, the idea of priority in time stands out conspicuously. And in some instances of its application to our Lord, this idea is express. We read that He is "the first-born of the dead" (Rev. i. 5), and "the first-born from among the dead" (Col. i. 18). He is so, not simply in the sense of being the greatest, the most conspicuous, the most glorious of the children of the resurrection, but also in the sense of being the forerunner of all the rest. The resurrection proper began chronologically with our Lord.

But in other instances of the application of the designation to Jesus, the secondary idea of patrimonial precedence overshadows the primary idea of chronological anteriority. It is said for instance in Col. i. 15, that He is "the first-born of the whole creation." (*Comp.* Ephes. ii. 21; Homer's *Iliad*, xxiv. 407; and the Rabbinical phrase *First-born of the 'world.'* — SCHÖTTGEN'S *Hor. Heb.* i. 922.) The idea is not that our Lord is included in creation as an integral part—the first emanation of the creative power of the Father. The genitive is not partitive. The expression is pregnant. Our Lord is the Prince Imperial of the universe. All creation is his patrimonial inheritance. "All things were created *for* him," as well as "through him," and "by him" (Col. i. 16).

In Romans viii. 29, again, we read,—"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, *that he might be the*

first-born among many brethren." We cannot suppose that it was the Divine aim to secure a relation of chronological anteriority for the Son. That did not need to be aimed at. The aim was to remove from the peerless Son the condition of solitariness in the paternal home. And this aim was accomplished by surrounding him with a circle of brethren, who might share with him his glory. Precedence in position dominates over the primary idea of precedence in time.

There is an entire submergence of the idea of precedence in time in a subsequent passage of our Epistle (chap. xii. 22, 23), where the term is transferred to some of the human brethren of our Lord. We read,—"Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, *to the general assembly and church of the 'first-born,' which are written in heaven*, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." Who are referred to? Is it the members of the celestial Church, in virtue of their priority in possession? No, for the first-born spoken of, though enrolled in the registers of heaven, are expressly distinguished from "the spirits of just men made perfect." It is, it would appear, the members of the Church below who are referred to. Even while below they are "the general assembly and church of *the first-born*," because, in consequence of their vital union with Him who is emphatically the first-born Son, they are partakers of the prerogatives of his primogeniture. They are "heirs of the world" (Rom. iv. 13, 14); "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17).

As regards the Old Testament usage of the term, we find God saying to Pharaoh, in Exodus iv. 22, "Israel is my son, my first-born." It seems to be national pre-eminence rather than any form of chronological anteriority that is intended. It is said again, in Jeremiah xxxi. 9, "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born." It seems again to be national or tribal prerogative that is meant. And when it is said of David, in Psalm lxxxix. 27, "I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth," the second clause of the promise explains the first, and shews that the idea of rank overshadows and supersedes the idea of antecedence in time. (*Comp.* Job xviii. 13; Isa. xiv. 30.)

There is, apparently, the same overshadowing acceptation of the term in the passage before us. Our Lord is the Father's first-born in the sense of being his *Son and heir,—the Prince Imperial of the universe.*

To proceed. "*And* whenever he shall have brought in again the first-born into the world, *he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*" The delicacy of the connection with the preceding verse is somewhat hidden under the shade of the English copulative *and,* the corresponding *und* of Luther, and the *et* of the Vulgate. This use of the purely aggregative copulative was, no doubt, suggested—to Luther at all events, and to our English Translators—by the erroneous construction which they give to the adverb *again.* The conjunction, however, which is employed in the original, is the adversative particle *but* (δέ). The writer as it

were says,—*To not one of the angels was it ever said,—*

My Son art thou,
I this day have begotten thee;
and again,—
I will be to him for Father,
And he shall be to me for Son;

'but' something very different, something that distinctly recognizes the greatly lower grade of their position, is said of them,—

And let all the angels of God do homage to him.

This, says the inspired writer, *he saith*, that is *God saith;* not, *He will say.* Had he used this latter expression, he would have been predicting; but he had no intention whatever of uttering, at present, any prediction. It was his humbler aim to produce from the writings of the Old Testament an appropriate quotation involving a prediction of the pre-eminence of Christ. Hence the expression *he saith* means *he saith in Scripture.* It is as if the writer had expressed himself thus,—*we find it said in Scripture.* But as Scripture was to him 'the word of God,' his expression is equivalent to this,—*we find Him saying in Scripture.* The Letter-writer shifts, almost imperceptibly, and as it were unconsciously, his angle of vision. In the first clause of the verse he thinks of God as acting within the sphere of Providence in time to come; in this he thinks of Him as speaking within the sphere of revelation in time past.

The saying referred to is the statement,—*And let all the angels of God do homage to him.* The adduction of such a passage, for the purpose contem-

plated by the Letter-writer, has occasioned much perplexity to not a few students of the Epistle. Ebrard, for example, says: "Our sixth verse belongs indisputably to the most difficult in the whole Epistle." But the difficulty is, after all, artificial and insignificant.

Two questions confront us. (1) Whence is the citation taken? (2) What is its genuine import?

As to the first, there are two opinions ventilated among expositors. Some—a very large proportion—suppose that the passage referred to is Psalm xcvii. 7—*Worship him all ye gods*, which is rendered in the Septuagint, *Worship him all his angels*. Others, including several of the Fathers and a very decided majority of the latest critics, maintain that the quotation is taken from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy xxxii. 43, the last verse of the "Song of Moses."

This latter opinion would, doubtless, have commanded the suffrages of all without exception, had it not been the case that there is no higher authority for the canonicity of the passage than the Septuagint Version; inasmuch as there is not a vestige of anything equivalent to it in the Hebrew original, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Targum of Onkelos, the Vulgate, or the Syriac. Immediately before the concluding words of the song, which begin thus,—

Rejoice O ye nations with his people,

there occurs in the Septuagint the couplet—

Rejoice ye heavens along with him,
And let all the angels of God worship him.

The last line of this couplet is identical, word for word, with the Letter-writer's quotation.

Whence this identity? Some, inclusive of Dr. Owen, have thrown out the conjecture that the couplet may have been surreptitiously foisted into the Septuagint by some Christian more wily than wise, for the very purpose of substantiating the Letter-writer's allegation. It is a wild conjecture, wanton as wild, wilful as wanton, and baseless as wilful. There is absolutely no reason for supposing that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews so paltered with his citation as to leave it to his successor to invent for him its original. Neither is there any reason for supposing that our imaginary and wily manipulator could have been successful in his attempted interpolation. Multitudes of copies would have escaped his unscrupulous hands; and hence there would now be diversity in the existing MSS., many uncorrupted copies exhibiting no trace of the tampering. But the MSS., it seems, are unanimous in presenting the couplet.

There is but one alternative. Either the Letter-writer quoted from Psalm xcvii. 7, and allowed himself the freedom of modifying the form of the original; or he actually found in his Septuagint the words that at present stand in Deuteronomy xxxii. 43.

There is an insuperable objection to the hypothesis that the quotation has been taken from the ninety-seventh Psalm, and freely manipulated in the transference. The copulative *And* stands unaccountably at its commencement. It was of no value whatever for the writer's doctrinal object. It does not enhance in any way the idea embodied. It adds no beauty, it gives no point, to the expression as an

expression. It is, in itself, a cumbersome prefix, awkward and useless. It is utterly incredible that the Letter-writer should, in a mere freak of freedom, have invented and intruded it. How, then, are we to account for it? There is nothing corresponding to it in Psalm xcvii. 7. And for the very reason that there is not, we are shut up to the conclusion that the quotation is made, not from the Psalm, but from Deuteronomy, where the copulative is found, and is natural, justifying itself in virtue of the relation that subsists between the two lines of the couplet.

What then? Are we to accept the canonicity of the Septuagint couplet, although it is wanting in our Hebrew Bible? Why not? There is no reason for supposing that the Septuagint Translator invented the lines and smuggled them in. It is more reasonable, by far, to suppose that he found them in the copy from which he translated, and that their absence from our present Hebrew Scriptures is due to one of those casualties to which every ancient document, requiring to be transcribed, and committed to the custody of imperfect and fallible men, is liable.

If, however, it should be thought credible that the Septuagint Translator actually invented his couplet, and thrust it in privily and amplifyingly into the text, and succeeded in obtaining for it universal currency; still, even on this supposition, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews might be justified in borrowing that portion of it which he quotes. For, in the first place, the sentiment of the passage

is in harmony with the lofty scope and tone of the Song. The couplet only throws up, sky-high, in a brilliant corruscation, the tense accumulated emotion that had been gathering all along the progress of the preceding theocratic representations. The triumph of right over wrong, of goodness over evil, by the might and mercy of Jehovah, has been asserted, and stands assured. But the assurance is, from first to last, bouud up in the glorious Messianic relationship of God. He is "in Christ." Whenever the Divine light gleams forth to illumine the gold, the silver, and the precious stones, which build up the universal temple of holiness, and whenever the Divine lightning leaps forth to burn up the combustible and the unreal, there is the presence and the operation of Him who is, and was, and ever will be, the Outcome and the Effulgence of the Father's glory.

Then in the second place, the substance of the quotation, though not its form, *is* found in Psalm xcvii. 7. And it was surely competent to the inspired writer to quote the sentiment of the Psalm, although he should choose to clothe it in the phraseology which was laid to his hand by the Translator of Deuteronomy.

We turn now to the second of the two questions that confronted us, — *What is the import of the citation?*

There is no difficulty at all in answering this question, on the natural hypothesis that the writer simply quotes the Septuagint couplet in Deuteronomy as canonical Scripture. "*And let all angels of God do homage to him.*" It is Moses who

apostrophizes the angels, but he acts as the spokesman of all who agree with him in spirit. It is thus a man who speaks: or, as we may so put it, it is men who speak. Yet the Letter-writer ascribes the words to God Himself. He does so on the principle already stated, that he looks upon the whole Scripture as "the word of God."

The expression *angels of God* is not quite equivalent to the absolute term *angels*. It tacitly distinguishes between God and the Being to whom the homage is to be paid. Rightly. For though the Father and the Son are truly 'in' one another, and are thus sublimely 'one,' there *is* a personal distinction.

If, however, we should assume that it is the sentiment of Psalm xcvii. 7 which is quoted by the Letter-writer, while he clothes it in the dress of the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy, then one question more confronts us,—*How are we to account for the word 'angels,' when the original runs thus, 'Worship him all ye gods'?* On what principle, in particular, was the Letter-writer justified in adopting that translation as fairly available for the argument he had in hand? When there is no mention in the original of *angels*, but only of *gods*, was it legitimate to adduce the passage as a proof-text in support of the idea that the angels are inferior in rank to the Saviour?

There is no real difficulty in answering these questions, when one gets beyond the merest shallows of criticism.

The word *gods* is not a proper name, but an appellative. And although the word *God* is now

often used as a proper name, it is really by a special license of speech that it is thus employed. It has never renounced the character and position that belong to it as an appellative. Hence it is that we can say, *my God, thy God, his God,* while we cannot apply the same possessive pronouns to the proper name *Jehovah*. The word *God*, then, has a meaning that is applicable, at least in thought, to an entire class of beings. This is the case, not only in English, but equally in Hebrew. Indeed, the Hebrew term,—the one which was the favourite of the people, and which therefore is generally employed in the Old Testament, the term *Elohim*,—is obtrusively generic in import. It is plural,—plural both when denoting *God* and when meaning *gods*. This singular plurality, if we may so speak, is incontrovertible evidence that the term was originally appellative in import. It meant *Powers*. When preceded by the article, it denoted *the Powers*, or, as we might so phrase it, *the Higher Powers*.

There were many such *Powers*, according to the notion of the old heathen, whose mother-tongue was the primitive Semitic speech. There were "gods many." But to the Hebrews, blessed with special Divine illumination, all the varied *Powers* that had been adored by their forefathers, or that were still worshipped by the surrounding heathen, were gathered into a sublime Unity. There was to them but one God, at once the Confluence and the Fountain of all real Powers. "Who is God save Jehovah?"

While rising grandly into this conception of the unity of the Powers in God, the Hebrew people, by

a healthy assertion of linguistic freedom, retained the old Semitic plural name, *the Powers*. Significantly. *God was the Powers*. No real power was lost. And hence, while retaining the old plural appellative,—the 'survival' of the heathenism of their forefathers,—they construed it, plural though it was, with singular verbs and adjectives.

Nevertheless, there are still, in subordination to the infinite God, and by his will, numerous other *Powers* in the universe. Among the rest there are Powers on earth, — Political, Social, Magisterial, Judicial, Military, Literary; all which are, relatively to the masses, *Higher Powers*. And there are others, spiritual in nature, "excelling in strength," which are "in high places." There are hierarchies of "principality, power, might, and dominion," both "in this world and in that which is to come" (Ephes. i. 21). When such actual Powers, either above or below, were by the ancient Semitic people called *Powers*, the word which they employed was just their word for *gods* or *God*.

Hence the strange expression—strange to us—in Psalm xcvii. 7—"*Worship him all ye gods*." The meaning is, *Worship Him all ye Higher Powers*. And instead of supposing, with de Wette and others, that the reference is to the idols that are mentioned in the preceding part of the verse,—

Confounded be all they that serve graven images,
That boast themselves of idols,

we deem it to be more in accordance with the inartificiality and sublime simplicity of the bard to regard him as referring to existent Powers, real and living, the Higher Orders in the universe, "visible

and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" (Col. i. 16). The Apostle's classification but unfolds the meaning of the Old Testament phrase. The Septuagint Translator, if he erred at all, erred only in substituting a specific for a generic rendering. Angels were included in the Psalmist's expression, but not to the exclusion of other Powers.

Our Saviour said to the Jews, "Is it not written in your law, *I said, Ye are gods?* If he called them *gods*, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, *I am the Son of God?*" (John x. 34–36.) Our Lord refers to the eighty-second Psalm, in which certain High Powers on earth, who were lamentably abusing their high prerogatives, are summoned to the Divine bar. They are the Judges, the Rulers, the Sovereigns of the earth. These are *gods*—not in the grand ethical meaning that is inherent in our glorious Teutonic word *God*, never to be confounded with the Persian *Khoda*,—but in the meaning that was inherent in the old Semitic *Elohim*, of which the Psalmist had to avail himself, both in writing and in thinking.

It follows, then, whether we assume that the Letter-writer used the language of Deuteronomy while quoting from the Psalm, or, as is more probable, that he drew from Deuteronomy direct both the language and the sentiment, both the substance and the form, of his citation, the application to our Lord of the summons addressed to the angels is based on the most enlightened view of the purport

of Biblical Revelation. When God shall appear to judge our world — overturning and making clean, that He may keep it thenceforward as 'a Holy' in the universe—His appearance will in reality be 'the second advent' of our Saviour. It is our Saviour who is the living Manifestation of the Father, and who will yet be his living Manifestation "unto salvation." The Father's mind and heart come out fully in Christ. His Voice and his Word are Christ. The Son is the Effulgence of his glory, and the Impress of his hidden essence.

If the citation should be in form from the Song of Moses, and in substance from the Psalm of David, then the *angels* are specified by the translator interpretatively, and are referred to representatively, as the highest species of all those Higher Powers who should do homage to the Highest. But if—as is undoubtedly the case—the citation be alike in its substance and in its form from the Song, then it could only be virtually, and by way of logical implication or inference, that other Powers besides the angels are embraced. The angels alone are addressed; and the Letter-writer's argument is that of a master in reasoning as well as in oratory—unanswerable. J. MORISON.