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# ANGELIC BEINGS:

THEIR

NATURE AND MINISTRY.

BY THE

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## P R E F A C E.



**T**HE present papers are selected from a course of Lectures lately delivered to my ordinary congregation in Cheltenham. They are slightly altered and abridged to suit the present form of publication. My readers will hence judge why the style adopted is popular and practical, rather than metaphysical and abstruse.

In other Lectures I have dwelt upon individual instances of angelic ministrations to the sons of men. These may, perhaps, be submitted to public notice in a future volume. At present it is thought best to confine attention to a general view of the subject.

Nor would the series be complete without reference, sad and gloomy though it must be, to those angelic beings who kept not their first estate, but became rebels, and, in consequence, outcasts from the favour

of God and the bliss of heaven. Their original happiness, their sad declension, their evil influence upon men, their present wicked doings and future tremendous doom; these are subjects for trembling interest and for solemn warning. But this part of the question must also be postponed to a future opportunity.

How is it that the subject of angelic agency, fraught with so much comfort and instruction, has been so largely neglected amongst us? "So little has been revealed, we must not be wise above what is written!" "It is the part of humility not to pry into subjects so much above us!" Such are some of the excuses invented, it is to be feared, in too many cases, to cover idleness and justify indifference. It is not real humility to ignore what God has disclosed. It is the part of true wisdom to investigate prayerfully, and grasp firmly, what the Holy Ghost has been pleased to reveal, whether little or much, on this and on every other subject.

"Thinking about angels," another will say, "may lead to the worshipping of angels, as witness the modern Church of Rome." A very poor argument this. Are we to renounce a privilege because some have abused it? Are we to grope willingly in dark-

ness because Satan sometimes is transformed into an angel of light? Grant that the Apostate of the seven hills has transformed these sympathizing friends into unwilling objects of shameless idolatry; I would simply ask what saving Gospel truth has not Rome travestied and corrupted? What streams from the Fountain of Life has not Rome polluted and poisoned?

We will not give up our Bibles because the Vatican proscribes them. We will meet the enemy with the sling and the stone. "What is written," shall be our study,— "Thus it is written," shall be our weapon. Let us, then, strive to make ourselves acquainted, so far as may be, with those spiritual beings who are our trusty friends now, and are to be our loving companions hereafter.

The attempt now made to unveil angelic character, and to trace angelic agency, I commend to the Lord of angels, and the blessing of the Spirit, in the hope that it may be instrumental in promoting His glory and comforting His saints.

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I.

ANGELIC BEINGS.

" Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength,  
that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of  
His word."

PSA. ciii. 20.



## Angelic Beings.

---

**W**E inhabit a world of boundless variety and beauty. The Book of Nature is written within and without with truths fitted to elevate as well as to awe the mind. All that we see around us illustrates the infinite resources of an Omnipotent Creator, who "spake, and it was done," who "commanded, and it stood fast." The beauties of nature are eloquent, not only touching the Divine power, but the Divine love also, which willed a universe into being, that He might lavish upon it the proofs of an infinite affection. When we speak of creation, we mean not simply the objects of sense; not merely the system of worlds, compared with which our planet is little more than a large aërolite; not exclusively the material heaven, or the earth and

those who people it. We include that vast multitude of Intelligences who have no bodily form,—none at least that our present eyesight can discern—beings who “excel in strength,” as God’s word declares, and in wisdom also, for they “do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.”<sup>1</sup> These occupy an intermediate sphere between the Divine and the human natures. It is but natural to suppose that there should be other and nobler forms of life between us and the Highest Life of all. The microscope reveals to us new regions of animated existence in the descending scale. Between the lowest form thus laid bare, and man, with his marvellous apparatus of bodily organs, his moral and mental faculties, and the dignity conferred on him as creation’s lord and master, a whole world of separation intervenes. It were unreasonable to suppose that the ascending scale of life stops with man; that there are no connecting links leading upwards through various grades and orders to the Eternal and Infinite Jehovah, King and Creator of all. But we are not left to conjecture on this interesting subject. Scripture has laid open

<sup>1</sup> Psa. ciii. 20.

to our view the world of unseen spirits, and has given some information about the thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers in the heavenly places;<sup>1</sup> revealing to us their differing ranks and stations, the attributes that belong to them, the enjoyments they possess, the employments in which they are engaged. The Bible abounds in angelic appearances and angelic ministrations. Angels meet us at the beginning of the Old Testament, and are closely associated with some of its most remarkable histories and events. They meet us also throughout the New Testament. We find them ministering to our Lord, and to His servants the apostles; and we learn from the wondrous book which closes the sacred canon, that they have an important part to fulfil in the events that shall wind up the present dispensation.

Such being the case, and since there are so many facts and promises of Holy Writ relating to "the elect angels,"<sup>2</sup> and so many warnings and exhortations connected with the fallen angels, it must be profitable to consider what Scripture reveals touching those great and glorious spirits, to whom the Psalmist

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. v. 21.

makes the stirring appeal: "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word."

I shall, in the present lecture, deal generally with the subject of good angels, their ministry and mission; glancing at the several Scripture accounts of their appearances to men, and to Him who for our redemption became a Son of man.

Angels are introduced to our notice very early in the Bible. Adam falls; the curse is pronounced; Paradise can no longer be the abode of the guilty pair: they are expelled, and two cherubim are placed at the gate of Eden, with "a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."<sup>1</sup> An angel comforted Hagar when she fled from the face of her mistress into the wilderness, and sent her back to the tent of Abraham, with the promise that she should become the mother of a son whose seed should "not be numbered for multitude."<sup>2</sup> Again the angel of God consoled the weeping bond-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xvi. 10.

woman when she was an outcast with her boy from the patriarch's tent. The water in the bottle was exhausted, and when, in a mother's despair, she threw her child under one of the shrubs, and withdrew a good way off, that she might not see him die, this heavenly messenger opened the eyes of Hagar, blinded by her tears, and she saw a well of water bubbling up at her feet: the life of the lad was saved, and he became, according to the Divine promise, "a great nation."

Three angels in the guise of men appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. One of them—evidently the Lord of angels Himself—foretold the birth of Isaac, and the approaching judgment on the Cities of the Plain. It was an angel who, when Abraham was on the point of sacrificing his son, in obedience to the Divine command, discovered to him the ram caught in a thicket by his horns. Two angels placed each a hand upon Lot, and compelled him to leave the doomed Sodom. Jacob had a vision of angels at Bethel, when, with the ground for his bed, the stone for his pillow, and the sky for his canopy,

he saw in his dream a mystic ladder reaching from earth to heaven, which was traversed by these bright messengers of God. A troop of angels—"God's host"—met Jacob at Mahanaim, before his interview with Esau after his return from Padan-aram; and it was with an angel—the Angel of the covenant—that he wrestled at Peniel through the night until the breaking of the day.

It was the same angel who went before the chosen nation as they left Egypt, on their way to the promised land. This angel appeared also unto Joshua before Jericho, and revealed himself as the "Captain of the host of the Lord." It was an angel who came to Manoah and his wife, and gladdened their hearts by the promise of Samson's birth. An angel shut the mouths of the hungry lions when Daniel, falsely accused, was thrown into their cruel den. It was an angel who commissioned Philip to go down from Samaria into the desert of Gaza, to meet the Ethiopian eunuch. An angel informed Cornelius the centurion that his prayers and his alms had gone up for a memorial before God. An angel delivered Peter out of the prison into which he had been thrown by

Herod. An angel stood by Paul on the night of the shipwreck in the Ægean Sea, and assured him that not a life should be lost in the storm.

Thus angels appear again and again in the Old and New Testaments. Now they come with messages of mercy, now with denunciations of wrath. Sometimes they are ministers of God's loving mercy, sometimes of His righteous judgments. An angel slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, in punishment of Pharaoh's pride ; an angel brought a pestilence upon Jerusalem, for the sin of David in numbering the people ; an angel destroyed in one night a hundred and fourscore and five thousand of the Assyrian foe ; an angel struck Herod with a loathsome disease, as he sat upon his throne, and whilst the voices of a blasphemous flattery were sounding in his ears.

Thus angels are the ministers of God in His providential government of this lower world. And as they delight to do the commandments of the Lord, "hearkening unto the voice of His word," it was but natural that when the eternal Son left heaven for our sake, and was made in the likeness of men, they should attend Him through each stage of His earthly

career. It is Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, who announces to Mary that she is to be the mother of the world's Redeemer ; angels proclaim to the shepherds that Christ is born in the city of David ; a choir of the heavenly host fill the night with songs as they herald the glad event, and praise God by singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."<sup>1</sup> "When He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."<sup>2</sup> When Herod threatens the young child's life, an angel warns Joseph to go down into Egypt ; and when this danger is past, an angel bids him return to the land of Judea. When our Lord is led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and is there left exhausted from the preceding long fast, and the terrible struggle with the evil one, "angels came and ministered unto Him."<sup>3</sup> Towards the close of His life of sorrow and toil, when He knelt in an agony in the garden, "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him."<sup>4</sup> "Twelve legions of angels,"<sup>5</sup> He tells

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. iv. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxii. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xxvi. 53.

us, would have flown to His rescue, had He but spoken the word; and, "encamping round about Him" with their shining squadrons, would have delivered Him from the hands of His enemies; but it must not be—for how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? So no angel interposes on His behalf: He is betrayed into the hands of enemies, mocked, scourged, buffeted, crucified, "for us men, and for our salvation."

But when all is over, and when the cross has been endured, the shame despised, the sin borne; when the sacred body has been taken down from the tree, and laid in the rocky tomb, angels appear again. An angel rolls away the stone from the door of the sepulchre; angels tell the wondering and weeping women that the living One is not to be sought among the dead, for that "He is risen," as He said. And when, after forty days, He ascends far above all heavens, it was angels, we may be sure, who called upon the gates to lift up their heads, and the everlasting doors to throw open their portals, that the King of glory might come in; whilst angels upon earth assure His gazing disciples that He

“shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

Nor did the ministrations of angels to Christ terminate here. They are continued in the world above, where “the King eternal, immortal, invisible” unveils the splendour of His face, and the Lamb stands in the midst of the throne: there they worship before the footstool of the Redeemer, and present unto Him an unceasing tribute of praise. “I beheld,” says St. John, “and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”<sup>2</sup>

It is revealed, moreover, in the Apocalypse, that angels are constantly employed by the Redeemer as ministers of His will; that through them He carries on the government of the world and of His church to the end of time; that they are His agents in restraining the violence of persecution; in sounding

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. v. 11, 12.

the trumpets of judgment ; in pouring out the vials of wrath upon the enemies of God ; in raising the shout of triumph over the fall of the mystic Babylon, and in celebrating the Saviour's victory over all His foes. Angels are to accompany the Saviour when He comes to judgment : they are to reap the harvest of the world, to separate the tares from the wheat, and to gather out from His kingdom all things that offend, and all them that work iniquity.

We see then how the Bible, from first to last, records angelic ministrations, not only to the servants of God, but to the Son of God Himself. What reasons have we for believing in the continuance of angelic ministrations to the disciples and servants of Christ in the present day ?

It is a remarkable as well as beautiful saying of the apostle John, "As He is, so are we in this world."<sup>1</sup> "As" Christ "is, so are we" in point of privilege ; "partakers" in Him "of the Divine nature ;" raised up together with Him, and made to "sit together in heavenly places ;" and in various ways sharers in His kingly glory. And this sameness of privilege being

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 17.

a law of that kingdom in which He is "the firstborn among many brethren;" in which we are "heirs together with Him" of all those rights of adoption as sons of God, one result is, that as angels were His attendants as "the Heir," so, by His gracious appointment, they are our attendants as "heirs" likewise. It is true of His people now, as it was in the Psalmist's days, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."<sup>1</sup> Of us the promise holds good, even as it did of our Master, "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."<sup>2</sup> "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"<sup>3</sup> Angels take a deep interest in all that concerns us. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."<sup>4</sup> When saints meet for worship, angels are present. This appears from the apostle's injunction to the Corinthians,<sup>5</sup> that the woman praying

<sup>1</sup> Psa. xxxiv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Psa. xci. 11, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. i. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xv. 10.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 10.

or prophesying should have power (or "a covering") on her head "because of the angels." And if angels be present in our solemn assemblies, must they not be pleased or pained by our behaviour in the sanctuary, by the manner in which we worship the "Father of the spirits of all flesh," by the attitude in which we listen to the embassy of reconciliation?

It is thought by some that each saint of God has his guardian angel, whose eye is always upon him, and whose love continually guards him. This view largely rests upon the Lord's injunction, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven *their angels* do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Such angelic guardianship was certainly the belief of the early Christian church. When Peter was delivered from prison by the instrumentality of an angel, he knocked for admittance at the house of Mary the mother of John, where prayer was being made on the apostle's behalf. The assembled disciples hesitated to accept the literal fact, saying, "It is his angel,"<sup>2</sup>—his guardian and attendant spirit.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xii. 15.

Whether this notion be correct, or not, it is not too much to say that these bright and blessed spirits do, by God's appointment, lead us on our way, as they did God's servants of old; that they protect us as they did Daniel; that they fight for us as they did for Joshua; that they refresh, and strengthen, and deliver us from death, as they did in the case of many an ancient saint. And when the time of a believer's departure has finally arrived, they carry him, as they did Lazarus, into the unseen world, and rejoice to place him in the rest and safety of the Good Shepherd's arms. It may indeed be urged that there is One greater than angels who is our Friend—One as full of pity as He is full of power, and who is 'about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways.' Yet doth He act providentially towards us by the agency of creatures, whether angelic or human. And the angels, we must remember, are bound up with us in the unity of one blessed family in Christ; for it was the good pleasure of God "which He hath purposed in Himself, that He should gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." "Ye are

come," saith the apostle, amongst other blessed companionships, "to an innumerable company of angels."<sup>1</sup> Let us thank God for revealing to us this precious truth; and let us endeavour to glorify the Lord of angels and of men, who has knit us in one holy communion and fellowship with those pure and blessed spirits. Let us ask ourselves, Are we preparing for the society of such holy companions hereafter? Are we praying that God's "will may be done on earth as it is in heaven?" Are we living as we pray, and so beginning the life of heaven on this side the grave? Are we, through the promised aid of God's Holy Spirit, becoming "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?" May we so make it "Christ" to "live," that when we die, "death" shall be "gain," and angels may carry us home to heaven and to God. May we so honour Christ by a life of holy and blameless consistency, that when He comes again, and "shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,"<sup>2</sup> we may be found amongst those of whom

<sup>1</sup> Eph. i. 9, 10; Heb. xii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiv. 31.

the Saviour says, "I will confess them before the angels of God." And so, when this dispensation is ended, and the mystery of redemption accomplished, and the harvest of the world is gathered in, we shall find ourselves in that glorious temple where "the redeemed stand before the throne," and the angels stand round about it,—the ransomed forming the inner circle of that splendid throng,—and where the voice of praise ever soundeth: "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

Then shall saints and angels vie with one another in praising God. In their overflowing joy they shall provoke each other to richer strains of thanksgiving and adoration. And then the redeemed, in the fulness of their rapture, shall re-echo the invitation: "Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure."<sup>2</sup> Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. vii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Psa. ciii. 21.

II.

ANGELIC NATURES.

"Who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a  
flaming fire."

PSA. civ. 4.



## Angelic Natures.

---

**T**HE Bible contains a biography of man. It relates the story of his fall and redemption, his present conflict and future destiny. It reveals the existence of God; His character and attributes; His grace and glory; His loving dealings with this planet,—perhaps the only fallen world among the multitudes He created.

The Bible also introduces angels to our notice: beings who occupy the foremost rank of created intelligences. Some of these are “elect,” or “chosen,” who have been confirmed by God in their holy position. Others have “left their first estate,” and are in a condition of rebellion against their Maker. Let us examine the statements of Scripture respecting these glorious beings who hold an intermediate

position between us and God, higher at present than we are, of nobler powers and mightier capacities.

(I.) *Angels are many in number.* "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place."<sup>1</sup> Daniel the prophet "beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool. . . Thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him."<sup>2</sup> Elisha, compassed about with enemies in Dothan, thus allays the apprehensions of his faithful servant: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And when the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, in answer to the prophet's prayer, "he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."<sup>3</sup>

Other passages of Scripture bear testimony to the vast number of angels that wait on the will of the King eternal, immortal, invisible. Jacob, as we have seen, was met by two hosts of angels. Our Lord, in

<sup>1</sup> Psa. lxxviii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Dan. vii. 9, 10.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings vi. 17.

Gethsemane, asserts His power to summon "more than twelve legions of angels." St. Paul alludes to "an innumerable company of angels." St. John in the Apocalypse, when a door has been opened before him in heaven, hears the voice of many angels round about the throne, and "the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." In accordance with this idea, our great poet puts these words into the mouth of Adam,—

"Nor think though men were none  
That heaven would want spectators, God want praise.  
Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth  
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep;  
All these with ceaseless praise His works behold  
Both day and night. . . . Oft in bands,  
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,  
With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds,  
In full harmonic numbers joined, their songs  
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heaven."

(2.) *Angels are not only countless in number, but of different ranks and orders.* There are Cherubim and Seraphim, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers. These "morning stars" differ from one another in glory.

(3.) *Angels excel in strength.* The Psalmist ex-

pressly affirms this : " Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments."<sup>1</sup> St. Paul, speaking of the Lord's second advent, informs us that He " shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels," or the angels of His power. In the Apocalypse we read of an angel who " came down from heaven, having great power ; and the earth was lightened with his glory ;" and of another who is called " a mighty angel," who " took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all."<sup>2</sup> Not only does God's word attribute to angels this property of might and strength, but we gather the same truth from the works which they do, the achievements they accomplish. When God would destroy in one night the firstborn of all the Egyptians, He sent forth an angel, winged with death, to spread terror and desolation through the land. When David numbered the people, an angel is the agent in the pestilence that is to destroy seventy thousand persons as a punishment for the ruler's sin. An angel goes

<sup>1</sup> Psa. ciii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xviii. 1, 21.

forth at God's command, and smites in one night "a hundred fourscore and five thousand" of the Assyrian foe. At the touch of an angel the chains fall from the fettered limbs of Peter, whilst the iron gate opened of its own accord for the passage of the Lord's freeman. An angel lays his hand on the presumptuous Herod, and he is at once stricken in his pride,—he is "eaten of worms, and gives up the ghost." The angels' might is strikingly revealed in the mystic volume of the Revelation. Here angels are represented as restraining the winds, that they should not blow on the earth, or on the sea, or on any tree; angels sound the trumpets, and judgments of hail, and fire, and blood immediately follow. Angels pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth; and when the harvest is ripe for the Divine judgments, they thrust in the sickle, and cast the grapes into the great winepress of the wrath of God. Angels may, therefore, well be called "mighty angels," girded as they are with strength, and able to do whatever is commanded by God.

As a practical thought, there flows to us great comfort from this truth; for how safe and secure

must they be who are placed under guardianship so noble, and protected by spirits so powerful. David dwells upon this consolatory fact: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."<sup>1</sup> No king has such a retinue of attendants; no monarch, in his loftiest state, such a royal guard as the humblest believer in Christ Jesus.

(4) *Angels are holy beings.* These "stars of the morning"—these "sons of God"—were created pure and perfect, fitted to stand continually in the Divine presence, and to perform the will of the Triune Jehovah. "Holiness to the Lord" is inscribed on their dazzling brows; pervades all their thoughts; characterizes all their actions, and hallows all their employments. Their happiness consists in the service of their God. Some, with folded wings, wait the Lord's will before the throne; others, with out-

<sup>1</sup> Psa. xci. 9-12.

stretched pinions, fly with the swiftness of the wind to carry out His commands. It matters not on what errand they are sent,—whether to a king's palace or a peasant's hut; whether to the desert or the city; on a lofty mission or a lowly message; whether on a purpose of mercy or of judgment,—they go forth with the same desire to glorify God and to do His will. Whatever powers they have of knowledge, or of speed, or of strength, are all joyfully dedicated to Him before whom they cry with a voice that rests not day nor night,—“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

(5.) *Angels are immortal.* Our Lord, in refuting an objection raised by the Sadducees against the resurrection of the body, answering, said unto them, “The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels.”<sup>1</sup>

Angels, then, cannot die. Their ranks are never

<sup>1</sup> Luke xx. 34-36.

thinned by the inroads of "the last enemy;" "the king of terrors" is armed with no dread for them; they are beyond his power, they defy his dart. Time makes no wrinkles on their brow, writes no furrow on their cheek. They are free from the sorrows, and infirmities, and sicknesses to which flesh is heir. Though thousands of years have passed over their heads, they still shine in the loveliness of unfading beauty and undecaying strength. When they appear in the Scriptures they are represented as youthful in aspect—uninjured by the lapse of ages, and are still, after the flight of countless years, in the morning of an endless existence.

(6.) *Angels are gifted with high powers of intellect and knowledge.* Man has a mind of wonderful capacity. He can travel in thought and discovery from star to star; can ascertain the substance and measure the distance of suns and planets; and, rising above them, and passing beyond them, can hold fellowship with the eternal and ever-blessed God. But if the mind of man be thus great, we have reason to believe that it is surpassed by that of angels, whose attributes are in all respects nobler

and finer than his. Like the "four living things,"<sup>1</sup> they are "full of eyes within;" gathering knowledge by intuition, and able to enter into the marvellous plans and purposes of the Divine will. Their dwelling-place is a world of which it is said, "There is no night there." From that land of illumination ignorance is banished; there they see not "through a glass darkly," but "face to face;" they "know even as they are known." Theirs is the privilege of drinking from the very well-head of knowledge; of standing in the full lustre of the glory of Him whose works and ways are their constant study, and whose perfections it is their delight not only to comprehend but to weave into their songs of praise.

So much, then, we are taught by the Bible about angels. They are of various ranks and orders; their number is vast; they "excel in strength," and are girded with power; they are holy, blessed, and immortal; they are endowed with a lofty intelligence, and their knowledge of God, in whose presence they stand, is unclouded and clear. Such are those bright and blessed beings of whom the

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iv. 8.

Psalmist speaks, when, dwelling on the creative power of God, he exclaims, "Who maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flaming fire."

We may derive instruction and encouragement from the revelation made to us about angels. Remember the promise of our Lord,—“They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead . . . are equal unto the angels.” Let us try to grasp this one thought—“Equal unto the angels.”

The saints shall equal angels in power, and being girded with the same strength shall have possibilities of service before them, capacities for noble actions and lofty achievements undreamt of here, and which “it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.” Rapid as the lightning, swift as the wind, they will be able to pass from star to star, from one world to another, to the most distant provinces of the infinite universe to execute the commands of God. Saints shall equal the angels in holiness. Perfect and pure, and renewed after the image of God; not a sinful thought or evil desire shall ever soil their mind, or cast a shadow upon their soul. God’s will shall

be the rule of their being ; God's law their delight ; God's love the element in which they live.

Saints shall equal the angels in immortality. "They shall not die any more ;" unfading youth and beauty shall be their portion ; and, clothed in the glories of the resurrection, they shall shine with a splendour that imagination hath not conceived of here even in its wildest dream. Then "death shall be swallowed up in victory," and "mortality shall be swallowed up of life." Ages shall roll on, only to find the redeemed in the morning of an everlasting existence ; and their life, ever expanding and deepening, shall run parallel with that of the Everliving God.

Saints shall equal angels in knowledge. The book of nature shall open to them its marvels ; the volume of redemption its mysteries. They shall read all the wonders of Creation and Providence in the clear shining of the light of God.

"Equal to the angels." Is this all? Nay, I believe that the saved sinner shall hold a place superior to angels. Man, through redemption, becomes what an angel cannot become. "To which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have

l begotten Thee?" And though these words refer primarily to Christ, yet, inasmuch as all believers are made children of God by adoption, the expressions may be used as representing their pre-eminent dignity in the family of heaven. I claim for every saint in the household of God a position of higher honour than any which belongs to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, simply because Christ "took not on Him the nature of angels, but . . . the seed of Abraham;" and because through grace we become "partakers of the Divine nature." I would not, therefore, exchange the crown that shall be worn by the redeemed for any that circles an angel's brow. I believe that the ransomed of the Lord shall hold a position nearer to the throne than the very noblest of unfallen spirits. I say this advisedly, even while I bless the Lord our God for the creation in wonderful majesty, glory, and greatness of those blessed Intelligences of whom the admiring Psalmist speaks when he proclaims the truth I have been illustrating, "Who maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire."

III.

ANGELS CALLED TO WORSHIP.

“And again, when He bringeth in the Firstbegotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.”

HEB. i. 6.



## Angels called to Worship.

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**I**T is "the Lord of angels" that is to occupy our attention in the present lecture.

The inspired apostle<sup>1</sup> proves the superiority of Christ to angels, and shows how, in dignity and glory, He excels the highest of created beings. In exalting the Eternal Son to the throne of the universe, the apostle speaks of Him as "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person;" as one who "upholds all things by the word of His power;" and who, having "by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." He is made, we are told, "so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than

<sup>1</sup> Heb. i.

they. For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son? And again, when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him. And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." And then follows a sublime address to Christ the Lord—"the Alpha and Omega,"—"who was before all things, and by whom all things consist;" "who created all things, and for whose pleasure they are and were created." "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands. They shall perish; but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold

them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."

Let us consider the several respects in which Christ is superior to the angels.

(1.) *He is their Creator.* It was the "Word," the Son—"who was in the bosom of the Father from the beginning, who called the heavenly hosts into being; who dowered them with beauty, girded them with strength, and gave them the noble capacities and powers which they possess. Time was when Jehovah in the mystery of His threefold Deity was alone; when the communion and fellowship of the Eternal Three were all in all, and no creature hymned their praise, or worshipped before the throne. Then God, in the exuberance of a love that would make others sharers of His bliss, resolved on the act of creation, and through His Son, the great agent in giving effect to His will, filled immensity with worlds, and called various orders and ranks of intelligence into existence. *When* the first act of creative power was put forth we are not told; after what lapse of ages the worlds were summoned into being is not recorded. But in due time God, through the voice of the Word,

“spake, and it was done: commanded, and it stood fast.” Sun after sun, star after star, system after system, flashed into being, declaring the glory of God, and showing forth His handywork. As we have no information touching the time when the worlds were created, so have we none as to the time when the angels were formed. We know, however, that they owe their creation to Christ; for so much we learn from the sure word of God. When St. John opens his Gospel with the words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; the same was in the beginning with God,” he adds, “All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” St. Paul, in ascribing the glories of creation to Christ, sweeps the whole universe, and represents Him as giving birth and being to all orders and ranks of existence. “By Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things

consist.”<sup>1</sup> And as Christ was the Creator of angels, it was but natural that when in the purpose of God He was to become Incarnate for the redemption of the world, the Father should set Him forth in His new character of Mediator as an object of adoration. “When He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.”

(2.) That the Eternal Son is the Lord of angels evident from *the worship which these holy beings offer to Him*, and the reverence that they pay. The worship which He receives separates Christ from angels by an infinite distance. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”<sup>2</sup> These words of Christ are but an echo of the command which the Almighty addressed to the chosen nation when He placed Himself before them as the sole object of their adoration. That Christ may be worshipped, and is to be worshipped by angels and by men, is a proof that He is “God over all, blessed for ever.” Divine honours are paid throughout the Scriptures to the Son. In the

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Luke iv. 8.

sublime vision of Isaiah, when he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple," he beheld the seraphim, with faces veiled by their wings, in adoring worship before the Majesty of heaven. He heard them cry one to another, until the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."<sup>1</sup> "These things said Esaias when he saw Christ's glory, and spake of Him."

In the Book of Revelation we find that angels offer direct acts of worship to the Son, thus acknowledging His Divine majesty. "I beheld," says St. John, "and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them,

<sup>1</sup> Isa. vi. 1-4.

heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”<sup>1</sup>

This claim of Christ to universal worship is again and again insisted on in Scripture. Our Lord claims it for Himself. “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.”<sup>2</sup> St. Paul declares the same truth: God “raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet.”<sup>3</sup> And again, “God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>4</sup> St. Peter expresses the same truth. Christ “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God;

<sup>1</sup> Rev. v. 11-13.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxviii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. i. 20-22.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. ii. 9-11.

angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him."<sup>1</sup>

(3.) It is evident that Christ is the Lord of angels—the “Lord of hosts”—from this, that *He uses angels as His ministers* for the carrying out of His Divine will. In the government of the world, in His dealings with man, in His dispensations of providence and grace, He works by means—He employs the instrumentality of His creatures. Some are conscious, some are unconscious agents of His pleasure. Some are willing, others are unwilling ministers of His designs. He sends the canker-worm, and the palmer-worm, and the caterpillar, to punish a rebellious nation, and bring a famine on the land. He sends the ravens to provide for His prophet in a time of scarcity, and to bring him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening. He might have sustained Elijah immediately by His own direct power, and by His own visible hand; but it is His gracious will to work by means, and make His creatures carry out His purposes. He uses His angels in like manner. “He maketh His angels

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter iii. 22.

spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." He sends them "forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." "They do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." *How* these invisible spirits minister for us and to us we cannot say. There is a mystery in this, as in many other things; and we are compelled to acknowledge the inspired truth: "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, that they are appointed by the Saviour to be our powerful and faithful guards; that they keep us in safety; that they take heed that we come to no harm; that they defend us; go with us where we go; stand as warders about the house where we lodge; watch us whilst we sleep; see that we want nothing, and that nothing hurts or harms us,—is evident from the general teaching of the Bible. And is not this truth one which testifies to the security of the Lord's people? If a man were so dear to his earthly sovereign that he assigned to him a body-guard of the best, and strongest, and most trusty of his army, how

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

safely he might walk forth : no foe could hurt him ; no enemy could do him violence. This is but a faint illustration of the security of a believer, round about whom angels encamp, on whose steps angels attend. Why, then, should we not be strong, and of a good courage ?

Of course this promise of angel protection to " the heirs of salvation " may at times be suspended, and some danger be allowed to overtake us, some trouble to befall us, when God in His infinite wisdom sees that the light and momentary affliction will " work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But surely in both the angelic protection and the suspension of it for a season, is seen the love of God our Saviour to His own.

" Oh the exceeding grace  
Of highest God that loves His creatures so,  
And all His works of mercy doth embrace,  
That blessed angels He sends to and fro,  
To serve to wicked man—to serve His wicked foes.  
How oft do they their silver bowers leave  
To come to succour us that succour want ;  
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave  
The yielding skies, like flying pursuivant  
Against foul fiends to aid us militant !

They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,  
And their bright squadrons round about us plant;  
And all for love, and nothing for reward.  
Oh, why should heavenly God to men have such regard?"

And all this loving ministry to us is because of our union with Him who, having died for our sins, now ever lives to provide for our wants: who "took not on Him the nature of angels, but took on Him the seed of Abraham," whom the Father so delighted to honour, that, "when He bringeth the first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."

(4.) That Christ is Lord of angels is seen from this, that *He will use them as His attendants and His ministers in the solemnities of the great day of His second advent.* "The Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory."<sup>1</sup>

Again, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works."<sup>2</sup> What a glory shall then surround Him, as "He appears the second time without sin unto salvation," no longer

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxv. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xvi. 27.

as "the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," with marred visage and lowly form; but as "King of kings and Lord of lords," wearing His many crowns, and with the sceptre of the universe in His hand. No more "despised and rejected of men," He shall be welcomed with the songs of elect angels and redeemed men; not a voice among the myriads that attend Him to His throne shall be silent; and there shall not be a sound of discontent, nor a murmur of dissatisfaction, as "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." With what joy will angels who ministered to Him in His humiliation, see Him thus triumphant over sin, and death, and hell, and hear the voices of a great multitude as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

The prophet Daniel was permitted to see in vision this final triumph of the Son of God; and, rapt into the future, he beheld the overthrow of all earthly dignities and thrones, of all powers that oppose themselves to God, and he saw the establishment, in their

place, of a kingdom of righteousness, and peace, and joy,—a kingdom that could not be shaken or moved. “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.”<sup>1</sup> “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”<sup>2</sup> When Christ comes to judgment, angels shall be His ministering reapers. “In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye

<sup>1</sup> Dan. vii. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Dan. vii. 13, 14.

together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them : but gather the wheat into my barn.”<sup>1</sup>

Or, as He says in another passage, “The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.”<sup>2</sup> Or, as He speaks again, “He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”<sup>3</sup>

You see, then, how the Lord of angels uses these blessed spirits as the ministers of His will ; the witnesses of His justice ; the spectators of His righteous rewards. And as, with eyes bright with love and radiant with joy, they gather in the redeemed to glory ; as with faces stern with severity, and clouded with awe, they consign the wicked to the quenchless flame,—theirs may be a song similar to that of the saints who witness the judgments of God,—“Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name ? for Thou only art holy : for

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiii. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxiv. 31.

all nations shall come and worship before Thee ; for Thy judgments are made manifest." <sup>1</sup> Then, when the ransomed are safely gathered into the house of many mansions, and are made "pillars in the temple of their God, to go no more out," for them angel ministrations may cease ; but for the Son, never. There will be means still of doing His will, and executing His word ; they will still be as the wind to go forth on His high behests ; as "flames of fire" to burn in His happy service ; still shall they wait with folded wings to hear His commands ; still shall they fly with outspread pinions to perform His lightest wish ; and to all eternity shall the words have a meaning for the thrones and dominions, and principalities and powers of heaven : "When He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."

The conclusion of the whole matter is this. If angels delight to do the will of Christ, and find their greatest pleasure in His service ; how much more ought this to be the case with us, who have

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xv. 3, 4.

been redeemed by His agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion? We owe more to Christ than angels do. We are bound to Him by ties of which they know nothing. It is *our* nature, not *theirs*, that He wears for ever in heaven. He has bought us at a price at which they were not purchased. Therefore our love to Him ought to be stronger; our reverence for Him deeper; our devotion to Him more perfect. Let us endeavour by His grace to do His will "on earth as it is done in heaven."

When our earthly sphere of duty shall have passed away, if we have been "steadfast, immovable, always abounding" in His work, He will greet each one of us at the gates of glory with a salutation surpassing in blessedness any that may ever gladden the ears of angels: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxv. 21.

IV.

ANGELS PRAISING.

"Glorp to God in the highest, and on earth peace,  
goodwill toward men."

LUKE II. 14.



## Angels Praising.

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**N**O scene could be more peaceful than was presented on the night that the child Jesus was born. It is full of pastoral beauty and simplicity. Away from the roar of cities, and the din of human strife, and under the shadow of the solemn hills, with no sound but the bleating of sheep, a few shepherds were keeping watch over their flock by night. The skies above were radiant with stars; the grass below sparkling with dew; the world all asleep, save only a few watchers, faithful to their calling in the hours when others were at rest. Types of the Good Shepherd, they were ever mindful of their charge, leading them to green pastures, and making them lie down by still waters; carrying the lambs in their arms, and gently leading those that

were with young. To these men, engaged in their pastoral duties, and waiting, like others amongst the devout Jews, for the redemption of Israel, appeared the angel of the Lord in a glory that filled the darkness of the night with splendour. At this sudden burst of light the shepherds "were sore afraid;" but the angel reassured their hearts with the tender words, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." No worldly pomp attends the approach of this King; no flourish of trumpets announces the event; no palace opens its doors to receive Him; no purple and fine linen are prepared for His robes; a stable is to be His birthplace, and a manger the cradle where He is to lie.

But if earth is silent at the advent of her King, the skies are vocal; and heaven sends forth her principalities and powers to pay their homage, and to give Him royal honours. "Suddenly"—like the lightning

flash—"there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God." No doubt heaven sent all its armies forth to escort the Eternal Son to our world ; for if "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God" over the repentance of one sinner, all the principalities and powers, from the highest to the lowest, must have been moved by an event of such stupendous importance as the Incarnation of Him who was to bring many sons unto glory. And if at the creation of the world "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy," could one voice in the celestial choir have been silent when the world was about to be redeemed? And their song of praise,—what was it? One worthy of the event that called it forth. As it has been well said, "The heavenly hosts sing to the Child born in Bethlehem such a cradle-song as never was sung to monarch's son ; for in those swaddling clothes is wrapped a mystery into which even angels desire to look." It was a song of praise, an anthem of adoration—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." If the music of the song floated down to

this world in notes of triumphant gladness, it also ascended to heaven with the melody of thanksgiving and gratitude to God. The very heart of this song is given by a German commentator in these words: "This song rises up to the glory of God; comes down again to proffer peace to earth; rests with goodwill on men. . . . How is the glory of God manifested in the making earth peaceful, by mercy and goodwill shown to sinful man!" Or, as another beautifully says, "The angels' song soars to heaven, then stoops to earth, and concludes with men, as though it would for ever echo in the human heart."

The angels' song consists of three parts, which may well be considered in their order. "Glory to God in the highest,—on earth peace,—goodwill toward men."

(1.) *Glory to God in the highest.* This is the first note in the angels' song, and it is this which gives harmony to all the rest. The words are an announcement of what shall actually take place through the redeeming work of Christ. They affirm that because the Saviour is born, and by the work which He shall

accomplish, men shall be saved, the devil defeated, death abolished, and sin made an end of,—there shall arise a new revenue of glory to God. Redemption brought to light features in the Divine character that hitherto had remained unknown, and opened out, even to the celestial hosts, “a new infinity of perfections;” so that they understood for the first time that the Divine love could stoop to the lost, vanquish rebellion, and triumph over guilt. Mercy for the guilty was an attribute that lay hidden in the deep bosom of the Godhead till man fell, and was spared. The angels that never sinned did not need mercy, the angels who fell did not obtain it. A new perfection of God was made known, when to our first parents a Deliverer was promised, and when in the fulness of time the Incarnate Word came from the bosom of God, was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us. In creation God had revealed His omnipotence, His wisdom, and His love; in the swift vengeance that overtook the angels who sinned, He had manifested His justice; but in the wondrous work of redemption He made known His grace, and displayed to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places” an

attribute of the Godhead up to this time concealed. And as self-manifestation is the great purpose of Jehovah, the first and chiefest end of redemption must have been the exaltation of the Divine glory. God is not to be conceived of as One who was exclusively moved by compassion when He resolved to save the sinner ; but as determined for His own sake, and for the honour of His holy Name, to build up a Church out of the wreck and ruin of the fall. Not that this was His only motive, for He was moved also by the tenderest pity and compassion : “ God *so* loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>1</sup>

Well, then, might angels sing of “ Glory to God in the highest.” Well might they adore the *wisdom* which solved the difficult problem—how the glory of a holy God and the good of guilty man could be harmonized,—how the one could be displayed, and the other be maintained. Well might they adore the *holiness* of God, when they discovered that the Father passed the sword of vengeance

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 16.

through the bosom of His only-begotten and well-beloved Son, because He was the sin-bearer. Well might they adore the *justice* of God, when they knew that the Surety must die that the sinner might live; that by no general act of amnesty did God pardon the guilty; but that He punished our sins in the person of His Son, who died, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."<sup>1</sup> Well might they extol the *power* of God; for that power was more pre-eminently illustrated in the salvation of the sinful than it could have been in their destruction: a power wonderfully exhibited in Creation, more abundantly illustrated in Redemption.

As those "sons of the morning" thought of the Divine wisdom, holiness, justice, love, and power, that were displayed in the Incarnation, and anticipated the triumphs to be won by the "Child" that was "born," and the "Son" that was "given;" of God honoured, and of man redeemed;—well might they pour forth their joy in the lofty strains of praise: "Glory to God in the highest,"—this the first note in their song; *then, and closely con-*

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter iii. 18.

*nected with it* — “peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

(2.) *Peace on earth.* There can be no real peace on earth except it come in a way honourable to God, and consistent with His Divine glory. Sin banished peace from the world; God's holy law was violated, and His truth pledged to take vengeance on the sinners. “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;” “The wages of sin is death.” Man felt this as soon as he had committed the act of disobedience, and transgressed the Divine law. His conscience was at once alarmed, and stricken with a sense of guilt. When he “heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” he hid himself “from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.”<sup>1</sup> The old happy communion with God was forfeited! the two could not walk together now, for they were not agreed. How was the peace to be restored? How was the breach to be healed? Not by anything that man could do; not by any plea for pardon that he could put forth. Left to himself man must

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 8.

perish. But, in man's extremity, God came to the rescue. He yearned over His sinning children, and longed to receive them back to His arms, reinstate them in His family, and restore them to His favour. But how was this to be done? How could peace be restored between God and man on such terms as should maintain His character as a God of truth and justice? There was only one way of restoring peace. God must send His own Son from heaven to earth; His glory veiled in human guise; "made of a woman, made under the law;" to obey where we had failed; to suffer what we had deserved; and so as our substitute to discharge our debt, and die that we might live. On these terms alone could we be saved: only through a cross where "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other." God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. At no less a cost was our peace purchased than what the apostle calls "the blood of God." In what gracious words is the announcement made, that peace has been given back to the world! "It pleased the Father that in

Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."<sup>1</sup> And now, having purchased our peace at so great a price, God, with an infinite loving-kindness and condescension, beseeches us to put aside our enmity, and to be reconciled: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the peace has been made; made at the great cost and incalculable price of the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, death and burial of the Son of God. Shall we not gladly accept it; and on the free, and frank, and liberal terms of the gospel,— "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved?" "Justified by faith we have peace with God;" for not only are we restored to a state of friendship with God, but the sense of reconciliation fills the whole soul with a "peace which passeth all understanding." "The God of hope fill you with

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20.

all joy and peace in believing,"<sup>1</sup> is the apostle's prayer for his converts. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,"<sup>2</sup> was the last legacy of Christ to His church; and where faith is strong, this peace does "flow like a river" through the believer's heart. What a prayer is that of Paul for the Thessalonian church: "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means."<sup>3</sup> "Always;" every day; every hour of the day; every moment of every hour. "By all means;" by sorrow as well as by gladness; by care as well as by joy; by crosses as well as by gains; by disappointments as well as by hopes fulfilled. And truly "in all times of our tribulation," as well as "in all times of our wealth," in life and in death, shall we enjoy unclouded peace, if we but realize the truth that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."<sup>4</sup>

Peace! There is music in the word. "Peace on earth!" It is a promise full of beauty; but has it been fulfilled? Is not the history of the world

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 27.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Thess. iii. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

written in blood and tears? Is there not on all sides mourning and lamentation and woe? Is not this globe distracted by wars and rumours of wars, that are bred in the wild passions and unsanctified lusts and ambitions of men? Does not "the whole creation groan and travail in pain together until now?" Do you look to the church of Christ for peace? Alas! you will not find it there. The church is like "a house divided against itself;" full of the din of controversy and strife; torn asunder by factious divisions and unseemly contentions. In vain you look around for peace: it is nowhere.

And is this always to be the case? Blessed be God, no. Better days are coming: brighter times are at hand. We have a sure word of prophecy which unfolds to us the future, and tells us that under the rule of the Prince of Peace, who shall be crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords, "the creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God;" swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning-hooks; and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig-tree, no one

making him afraid: "for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."<sup>1</sup>

"Oh, scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,  
 Scenes of accomplished bliss! which who can see  
 Though but in distant prospect, and not feel  
 His soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy?  
 One song employs all nations; and all cry  
 'Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us!'  
 The dwellers in the vales and in the rocks  
 Shout to each other; and the mountain tops  
 From distant mountains catch the flying joy,—  
 Till, nation after nation taught the strain,  
 Earth rolls the rapturous Hosanna round."

The vision tarries, but come it shall. All things are hastening forward to the happy time when the angels' song shall be echoed in every land; and from a restored and regenerated earth shall rise the anthem to heaven: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

(3.) *Goodwill toward men.*<sup>2</sup> The Incarnation

<sup>1</sup> Hab. ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The accuracy of this translation has been questioned. Many would read, with the Vulgate, "Peace on earth to men of good-will." The rendering of our Authorised Version is, however, retained as being probably correct.

was the expression of the "goodwill of God toward men." The "goodwill" existed in the Divine bosom long before, but now it took visible shape, and appeared amongst men. But the goodwill itself dates from eternity. It was "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" that God, in the greatness of a love which passeth knowledge, "gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It was "according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace," wherein He hath made us "accepted in the Beloved," that "He predestinated His people unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself." Christ was the gift of the Divine love, the expression of the Father's willingness "that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth."

That God's will toward men was "good-will," was proved from the very hour of the fall by the promise made to our first parents of a Redeemer to come,—by the choice of a chosen nation from whom should spring the seed in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed,—by the types and prophecies

through which He sustained the hopes of His people ; and by His long-suffering, patience, and forbearance with the sinning children of men. It was seen also in the manifold gifts of Providence ; in the rain and sunshine from heaven ; in fruitful seasons, filling the heart with joy and gladness ; in the regular return of seed-time and harvest, summer and winter. In all these mercies we have unmistakeable proofs that the will of our heavenly Father towards man was "good-will ;" but that which put the crown upon all,—which gave them their meaning and significance, was the Incarnation of the Son of God. No wonder, then, when the Highest bowed the heavens, and came down to the manger at Bethlehem ; when He, who "clothes Himself with light as with a garment," clothed Himself in human form ; when He that dwelt in the Father's bosom stooped to tabernacle with men, and such an expression was given to the Divine love as surpassed all former manifestations of this attribute ; no wonder that the voices of angels should be heard singing in the skies, and that their song should be this : "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? If redemption employed angels' songs, shall it not be the subject of higher strains and loftier raptures on the part of us men? "He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham."<sup>1</sup> "Unto us," not unto angels, was "born in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." How ought we to sing!—we who have been redeemed; we whose humanity is the robe that the Eternal Son wears in heaven; we who through grace may become "partakers of the Divine nature," "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!" If we believe these "glad tidings of great joy," our hearts will be fired with love, and we shall go on our way rejoicing, our lips thrilling with the grand old song:

"Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it:  
Shout, ye lower parts of the earth:  
Break forth into singing, ye mountains,  
O forest, and every tree therein:  
For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob,  
And glorified Himself in Israel."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xlv. 23.

Let "the heavens sing," for there the saints, crowned and throned with Christ, shall live for ever in His love; and ten thousand times ten thousand voices shall proclaim, in tones of ceaseless adoration: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Let the earth also break forth into singing; for it has been redeemed,—and hereafter, delivered from the curse of briars and thorns, it shall be visited with an imperishable spring; and, when purified by judgment fires, shall become the seat of the Saviour's kingdom and the Church's triumph. Then

"Praise the Lord from the earth,—ye dragons, and all deeps:  
 Fire and hail; snow and vapours;  
 Stormy wind fulfilling His word:  
 Mountains, and all hills;  
 Fruitful trees, and all cedars:  
 Beasts, and all cattle;  
 Creeping things, and flying fowl."<sup>1</sup>

And let the saints praise Him:

"Let the saints be joyful in glory:  
 Let them sing aloud upon their beds;"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Psa. cxlviii. 7-10.

<sup>2</sup> Psa. cxlix. 5.

and let them call on others to join in their songs :

“ Praise ye the Lord from the heavens :  
Praise Him in the heights.  
Praise ye Him, all His angels :  
Praise ye Him, all His hosts.  
Praise ye Him, sun and moon :  
Praise Him, all ye stars of light.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus praising God we shall be in harmony with those celestial hosts, who, leaving their station before the throne of God, and speeding downwards from star to star, hovered over the stable at Bethlehem ; and as they anticipated the triumphs which the Divine Babe was to win,—man saved ; death destroyed ; the devil vanquished, and creation redeemed, gave vent to their joy in the jubilant song : “ Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”

<sup>1</sup> Psa. cxlviii. 1-3.



v.

ANGELS REJOICING.

" Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence  
of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

LUKE xv. 10.



## Angels Rejoicing.



**W**HAT a commentary are these words on the statement of St. Paul, when he speaks of “the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus.” “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell ; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself ; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

There is harmony established between this planet and the upper world. It is no longer a poor wandering star, cut off by its rebellion from sympathy with holy orders of other being ; but, reconciled to God, it is reconciled to the “ thrones and dominions,

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 19, 20.

and principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

There are bonds of sympathy linking it with the ranks of bright spirits who move in the light of the Divine countenance. A ladder of communication reaches from heaven to earth, and all its steps are aglow with the splendour of angel forms speeding up and down in their ceaseless ministry of grace. There are "ninety and nine" worlds which rejoice over the recovery of the one that went astray. They feel the deepest interest in redemption; and when a sinner leaves the far country, and returns to his Father's house; when, wearied of the husks of the world, he longs for the bread from his Father's table; then ministering angels rejoice as those who have found great spoil. It is the Saviour who tells us this. *He* who knows the cause of all their gladness, and the keynote of their songs, says, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Let us examine into the reason of this joy. Why should angels rejoice over the repentance of a sinner?

Three answers may be given. Because the repentance of a sinner brings glory to God. Because by adding another member to the church of Christ, it so far completes the number of the elect. Because it secures the salvation of the penitent.

(1.) *The repentance of a sinner brings glory to God.* There is nothing so dishonouring to God as sin. It strikes at all His attributes; it is rebellion against His authority, disobedience to His law, rejection of His love. Sin insults the majesty of God; defies His power; challenges His anger; braves His wrath; and despises His grace. It is the abominable thing which God hates; which cannot enter into His presence; and which is opposed to all the perfections of His infinitely holy character. Angels know this; they see it in all its dreadful antagonism to Him who "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and who cannot look upon sin." Their love to God is perfect; their loyalty to God is pure; and they adore supremely that gracious Being who, when some of their number fell away, secured them in their first, high, and glorious estate. What, then, must they feel when they see the laws of the God whom they love

trampled on, disregarded, made light of? Can it be without emotions of the most lively sorrow that they behold His authority despised, His threatenings defied, and His promises treated with contempt? How exceeding sinful must sin appear to those who wait with faces veiled before His awful purity, ever crying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!"

And if sin be thus dishonouring to God, it necessarily follows that repentance (which is in its essence a change of mind) brings glory to God by the humble confession of sin, and a forsaking of all that is evil. Angels, therefore, rejoice when they see God honoured, and repenting sinners flocking to His footstool to bewail their past sins, mourn over a mis-spent life, and to surrender themselves, body, soul, and spirit, to His service for the future. And not only so, but in these subdued rebels they see a token of the Divine power; for it is His grace that turns the heart of stone into a heart of flesh; converts enmity into friendship; and breathes the breath of life into the dead soul. It is God who "makes a people willing in the day of His power;" causing such a revolution

in the heart that "old things pass away, and all things become new." It is Christ who, entering into the heart, drives out the strong man armed, and takes possession Himself, and establishes there that kingdom which is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And if this be the case,—if man, when he is converted, abandons sin, loathing what he loved, and loving what he loathed, and surrenders himself, body, soul, and spirit, to God ; if the penitent sinner is "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son ;" if he throws off the yoke of evil, in order to wear the yoke of Christ ; and if he is a manifest proof of the power of God unto salvation,—then we see why "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

(2.) Through the conversion of a sinner another member is added to the church of Christ, and *the number of the elect is so much the nearer to its completion.* Angels, who sang at the birth of Jesus the jubilant anthem : "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men ;" who waited upon the Saviour through the whole course of His

earthly life, and ministered to Him in His agony, must rejoice as often as He sees of "the travail of His soul" in the repentance of the sinful. Angels must be gladdened by any fresh proof that Christ has not died in vain. It must add immeasurably to their joy when they know that His cross and passion have not been endured without result, and that they have their promised recompense in the rescue of one sinner after another from "the wrath to come." Every fresh conversion is a new proof of the defeat of Satan, that prince of hell, who is the enemy of God and man; is an earnest, too, that the time is approaching when all the works of the devil shall be destroyed, and the wicked One shall be cast, bound and chained, into the lake of fire. Every fresh soul delivered from the bondage of "the god of this world," and added to the fold of Christ, is one more step towards the accomplishment of the number of the Lord's elect, and brings us nearer to that time when the Church shall be perfected, and a loud voice shall be heard saying in heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power

of His Christ,"<sup>1</sup> and the mystery of redemption shall be fulfilled.

The church of Christ is compared in Scripture to a spiritual house, and individual Christians to "lively stones" builded up together on the foundation, which is said to be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. So that in every trembling convert angels see a new stone added to the building, and therefore so much more done towards the final completion of that glorious temple, whose elements, gathered from all regions of the earth, shall rise up in noble and lofty proportions to fill the whole world with its beauty; and from whose shrines, filled with the indwelling Spirit of God, shall ever ascend the adoring anthem to Him that sitteth on the throne. Why should angels rejoice at this? Because they long for the time when the "great multitude" shall be "gathered together from the four winds," and be ushered into God's eternal heaven. For then shall be the manifestation of the Saviour's glory of which the prophets have sung, and which is to form the recompense of His untold sufferings in the work of redemption.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xii. 10.

Then shall that day break upon the globe which has been promised, and long hoped for, when creation itself shall be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Then shall the jarring strings be retuned; and throughout the length and breadth of a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," nothing shall be seen but joy and gladness, nothing heard but "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." Then shall death be swallowed up in victory; the graves shall resign their countless population; and an innumerable company, taken out of all countries, brought from all climes, shall be made kings and priests unto God, and shall reign for ever and ever. This is the restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began; those "times of refreshing" from the Lord, which shall descend upon a weary world like the dew upon the hill of Hermon, bringing with them "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and introducing the beauty and blessedness of the millennial day.

And can you wonder that the nearer prospect of

such an age, when "the knowledge of the glory of God" is to "cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," should excite in angels emotions of great joy? Can you marvel that songs of gladness should break forth anew as every sinner is brought home to the fold, and a fresh earnest is thus given that the hour is approaching when at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>1</sup> Can you wonder that the celestial host, seeing in the return of every wanderer the closer approach of this time, should break out into more lofty expressions of enraptured adoration, and thus prove that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth?"

(3.) Let us notice as a third reason for the joy of angels—*the interest they feel in the salvation of men.* There is something very touching in the thought, that those bright and radiant creatures who move in the light of the Divine presence, should bend

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 10, 11.

from their heavenly seats, and watch for human salvation "more than they that watch for the morning."

The Bible records three occasions upon which angels rejoiced in connection with this earth of ours. When God laid the foundations of the world: when He spake, and it was done; when He commanded, and it stood fast,—then "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Again: when "the Word was made flesh," they filled the skies with their songs. And now we learn that when a sinner is "turned from the error of his ways," a new wave of delight is added to the ever-flowing tide of their bliss. They turn their regards from those worlds of light which move in harmony and splendour through the vast fields of space; and looking downwards, fix their attention on the things that are passing in the earth. Their most anxious thoughts are with men. One great object of their desires is the salvation of man. They attend continually to this very thing. And why should angels long for the deliverance of the sinner, and be moved with anxiety for his return to God? Because they see clearly in the light of God's countenance the

beauties of holiness and the hatefulness of sin. They know that "there is no peace," and can be no peace, "to the wicked." They are aware that sin has filled the world with "mourning, and lamentation, and woe." They see, by many a sad example, and many a terrible illustration, that "the way of transgressors is hard." They are taught by the havoc worked in the human soul that sin purchases pleasure by the loss of all that is noble and good,—like the apples of Sodom,—fair to look upon, but turning to acrid ashes on the burning lips. And because angels see the ruin even now wrought by sin; the unrest and disquiet it causes in the soul; the wretchedness and misery it brings to all who live in it;—because they see this truth clearly—with eyes accustomed to heaven's light—they rejoice when men, convinced by the Holy Spirit, abandon their old ways, and turn to Him who, with love in His heart, forgiveness on His lips, and the cup of salvation in His hand, cries to all, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

And besides all this, angels know the awfulness of the future woe which awaits the impenitent. They

saw of old how God spared not those of their own company who sinned, but cast them out of heaven, and banished them from His presence. They had seen "Lucifer, son of the morning," fall as lightning from heaven,—“a wandering star, lost in the blackness of darkness for ever.” They may have looked into the horrible pit; they may have scanned the black depths of “the second death,” where the dying never die. They know that the threatenings of God are true, and shall be fulfilled to the letter, and that a course of wilful impenitence will be followed by the utter loss of all hope and happiness for ever. Here the longest night brightens into day; here the sharpest pains come to an end; here sleep brings sweet forgetfulness to the sufferer; but *there* is no morning to the night of anguish; no oblivion of the sorrow that preys upon the heart; no hope that the suffering will eventually cease; but a despair that weeps, and wails, and gnashes its teeth for ever. It is a deliverance from such wretchedness as this that justifies the joy of angels over a sinner's repentance. If that repentance did not secure an escape from some dreadful doom, I see no adequate reason

for their rejoicing. If all men alike are to be embraced within the arms of God's mercy at last ; if there is no hell from which to be saved, I see no reason for the gladness of angels when the lost sheep is recovered, and brought back to the fold. Indeed, on the supposition that there is no eternity of woe, or that salvation is to be universal, our Lord's words, assuring us that all heaven is moved to gladness when a sinner repents, are simply exaggeration, or a rhetorical flourish. It is only on the ground that there is a "worm which dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched," that I see a reasonableness in the joy felt in the presence of the angels of God, when the Father bids the principalities and powers to prepare their harps, giving as a motive for the general gladness : For this my son that was dead is alive again ; he that was lost is found.

And how this joy proves the everlasting safety of a penitent soul. It is not to be supposed that the joy of angels can ever be turned into grief because of the relapse of the restored, or that devils should have reason to mock because the songs of holy angels were premature. The son rejoiced over as alive will not

return to his old death of trespasses and sins ; the welcomed prodigal will never again leave his father's table for the husks in the far-off land. And looking at salvation as a perfected deliverance from "everlasting damnation," and a restoration to everlasting life, I not only bless God for giving up His Son to save us, but I see the deepest, truest cause for rejoicing on the part of the heavenly host ; and to me it is of all things the most natural that there should be "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The subject is full of the richest grace and consolation. How dear we must be to God, what objects of interest to angels, when our repentance ministers so deeply to their joy ! Heaven has an increase of blessedness from the salvation of a poor lost sinner ! Rich as must be its happiness, we can add to it by turning from sin, and yielding ourselves to God. We *may have* added to its happiness already ; songs may have been sung over us ; harps struck for our restoration and recovery ; and heaven filled with fresh music because of our return from the far land, because we have left the husks and the swine-trough

for our Father's home, and for bread from His table. Thanks be to the God of all mercy if it is so, and if we are heaven-born, and heaven-bound. For now angels are our "ministering spirits;" and they shall attend us on our path through life, till life is ended; and at death they shall carry us to the mansions of heaven, where with them we shall worship and adore before the throne, and live in the light of that face whose shining constitutes the happiness of the world above.

What an encouragement is this subject for all to repent! My brother, have you ever wished to be different from what you are? Are there wistful hours of sorrowful craving? lookings away from your evil habits, and longings for something better? It may be that the voice of God is calling you, the sound of your Father's voice speaking to your heart. Close not your heart against the Spirit's call. Turn from sin and self, from the world and its follies, from unrest and inquietude, broken cisterns, withered gourds, and perishing idols, unto God, the Fountain of living water. If you will now lay hold on eternal life, not only will there be rest and peace in your own

soul, but a fresh delight added to the bliss of heaven ; for all the angels there will sing "a loud Amen," in celebration of your deliverance from sin and Satan, from death and hell :

" Thus joy abounds in Paradise,  
Among the hosts of heaven,  
Soon as the sinner quits his sins,  
Repents, and is forgiven."



VI.

ANGELS INQUIRING.

"Which things the angels desire to look into."

1 PETER 1. 12.



## Angels Inquiring.

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**T**HESE words recall to our minds the directions God gave to Moses about the construction of the mercy-seat. The ark of the covenant was a striking symbol of God's gracious presence with His people, and typified the blessings connected with "the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." The ark contained Aaron's rod that budded, the golden pot that had manna, and the tables of the covenant. It was made of shittim wood; but the covering, or lid, was of massive gold, and was called the mercy-seat. At each end of the mercy-seat, and beaten out of the same gold that formed it, was carved a winged cherub; the faces of the cherubim turned one to the other, and they were placed in such an attitude that each seemed to

bend over the ark, as if with an earnest desire to look into the mysteries hidden under the massive lid.

Now that is the very attitude St. Peter ascribes to angels in the text, "Which things the angels desire to look into," or "to peer into." "Bend over" would be the more literal rendering of the Greek; and this expression makes the reference to the cherubim on the mercy-seat more emphatic. The apostle leads us to think that cherubim and seraphim bend over the mysteries of godliness, as in the Jewish tabernacle their golden emblems bent over the ark; and that they gaze with intense interest upon the deep things of God as manifested in the salvation of the church. And since angels are represented as "*desiring* to look into," rather than as "looking into," with distinct apprehension, the wonders of the incarnation, and the sufferings and death of the only-begotten Son of the Father, we are not surprised at the apostle's declaration that they are "taught by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Thus have they gathered, or added to their knowledge of the Divine perfections and attributes from the gradual unfolding of type and prophecy, and from the ever-increasing clearness

with which God's purpose of mercy and grace was revealed as the ages rolled on.

The whole passage of Scripture in which the text is found justifies us in this supposition. Read from the tenth verse of the chapter: "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

Here the apostle tells us that "the sufferings and the glory of Christ" are the great subjects of all prophecy. Into the sufferings and glory of Christ, he says, "angels desire to look." This is our present subject—"angels desiring to look into the great mysteries of redemption."

In pursuing this theme, consider, in the first in-

stance, "the sufferings of Christ" as the object of angels' contemplations; and afterwards "the glory that followed" as engaging the earnest attention of "the principalities and powers in heavenly places."

(1.) I may remind you at the outset of our Lord's own words to the two disciples with whom He journeyed to Emmaus after His resurrection, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" In these words the Redeemer calls attention to the fact that the Scriptures everywhere bear testimony to a suffering Messiah,—that the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets alike speak in the clearest manner of a Saviour who should "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." But beyond this, and through the witness of Scripture, He directs their thoughts to the great truth that the recovery of our lost race by means of sacrifice was part of an everlasting purpose; that the atonement was the one harmonizing element of God's moral government in the salvation of sinners,—the great central fact in the Divine administration, where alone all the perfections of His holy nature could blend and meet.

The great problem of redemption was the salvation of the sinner in harmony with the majesty of violated law. This was part of the mystery hidden for ages in the Eternal Mind, and angels desired to look into "the sufferings of Christ," in relation to their bearing upon the legislative authority of God. They knew the law to be "holy, just, and good." It was the expressed mind of God; and, like Himself, could neither alter, nor relent, nor permit any abatement of its claims. To suppose that it could change, and that its standard could be lowered, would be to cast reproach upon the wisdom of its Author. For any law whose penalties are unconditionally remitted, is thereby confessed by the lawgiver to have been needlessly or unjustly rigorous at first. The mere abrogation of a solemnly declared enactment would imply the humbling confession that there had been something in the moral circumstances and liabilities of mankind which the Almighty had at first overlooked; and that, being afterwards convinced of the impossibility of the service which He had required of His creatures, He had seen fit to relieve them from the obligation of perfect obedience, and to accept their

repentance instead. To angelic intelligences the glory of the law was perfect, the wisdom of the Lawgiver in framing it unquestioned. That which they bent all the might of their intellect to discover was this : how could the holy, and just, and unchangeable God save the sinner, and at the same time " magnify the law, and make it honourable ? " The love that longed to flow forth to the transgressor must act in unison with all the other perfections of the Godhead. How, then, was the sinner to be saved ? There was the mystery.

The doctrine of a Divine and Incarnate Sacrifice is the only one which can vindicate the authority of a heavenly legislation. Christ must die, or the law must be dishonoured. God must not spare His Son if He would preserve His truth. Let sin go unpunished, either in the person of the sinner, or his substitute, and the Creator's honour would be tarnished. Less than " Christ crucified " would have been insufficient for the salvation of man. Christ suffering in our stead, made sin for us, and bearing our curse,—this magnifies the attributes of God, and meets the necessities of man. The cross is not only the deepest expression of the Father's love, but the

fullest vindication of Divine justice. Here was the meeting-place of God's perfections. Here "mercy and truth met together: righteousness and peace kissed each other." When we remember that the honour of the moral law was bound up with the sacrifice of Calvary; that the salvation of the cross presents God in the lustre of untarnished holiness, so that in Jesus He can be "just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly;" we shall in some degree understand the deep interest taken by the heavenly hosts in the obedience unto death of the Incarnate Word; and how, when the apostle speaks of "the sufferings of Christ," he may well add, "which things the angels desire to look into."

(2.) "Angels desire to look into" "the sufferings of Christ," to see *whether the costly agency by which it was wrought out was indeed needful*. Might it not have been purchased at a cheaper price? Was there not something prodigal in the means,—something extravagant in the effort by which it was secured? The more they examined this question, the better they would be taught that God acted in redemption on the same principle that runs through all the

Divine government ; the means He employs being accurately adapted to the end He intends to bring about ; and so, had salvation been possible in any other way than through the anguish and death of Jesus, the Father would doubtless have spared His only-begotten Son.

This truth was taught to the angels in the Garden of Gethsemane, where they came to minister unto the suffering Christ. You remember the prayer that went up to heaven from Jesus as He lay prostrate on the ground in His bloody sweat, and His "soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." God in heaven was silent. There was no answer to that agonizing supplication. The cup of suffering was not removed ; it was wrung out, even to the dregs. What does this teach us but that "it behoved Christ thus to suffer ;" that there was a deep truth underlying the words of scorn addressed to Him as He hung upon the accursed tree,—“He saved others ; Himself He cannot save ;” and that it was impossible that redemption could be purchased at a less costly price than that which the apostle calls "the blood of God."

When we speak of the necessity of Christ's sufferings, you are to bear in mind that this was in no degree a physical necessity, or one imposed by the sovereign will of God ; it was simply a necessity arising out of the nature of the work He had undertaken to discharge. His incarnation, His humiliation, His death, were perfectly voluntary. "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. . . . I lay it down of Myself."<sup>1</sup> Had He so pleased, He might have remained for ever in the bosom of the Father, encircled by angel hosts, and the object of universal adoration. But had He done so, what would have been the consequence? The law would have remained dishonoured ; the curse against our race unrepealed ; heaven's gate still barred against us ; and every child of Adam condemned to everlasting banishment from God. As the salvation of the church rested on the death of the only-begotten Son, and as the wisdom of God was bound up with the means employed, we cannot wonder that it is said of "the sufferings of Christ"—"which things the angels desire to look into."

<sup>1</sup> John x. 18.

(3.) As all Scripture testifies to a suffering Messiah, angels would desire to look into *the fulfilment of type, and the accomplishment of prophecy*. It had been intimated in no obscure manner from the beginning, that salvation was to be through the death of a substitute. Our Lord alluded to this when He reproached the two disciples, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! . . . And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." To that wonderful exposition angels perhaps listened. They would hear His words as He referred to the paschal lamb, the smitten rock, the sin-laden scape-goat, the serpent of brass, and the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat; nay, to the entire circle of types, ceremonies, and sacrifices, which so graphically set forth the grand doctrine of the Gospel—that "without shedding of blood is no remission." They would call to mind the ancient prophecies; how God had in the beginning revived the hearts of Adam and his wife by the promise wrapt up in the curse upon the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and

the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel :” how Isaiah foretold that the Messiah should be “ a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ;” that He should be “ wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities :” how David spake of the vinegar and the gall, the mockery and derision, the parting of His garments, the casting lots on His vesture : how Daniel declared that the Messiah should be cut off, but not for Himself : how Zechariah foretold the price for which He should be betrayed, and predicted that the “ sword ” should “ awake ” against the “ Fellow ” of Jehovah ; that “ the Shepherd ” should be smitten, and “ the sheep be scattered.”<sup>1</sup> As the Saviour directed the attention of the two disciples to all these witnesses of holy writ : showing how all the lines of prophecy and all the types of the law converged in Him as their centre, the listening angels would get more insight into the mysteries of redemption. But there were fresh discoveries to be made, and St. Peter in his day might still affirm : “ Which things the angels desire to look into.”

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 15 ; Isa. liii. 3 ; Psa. xxii ; Dan. ix. 26 ; Zech. xiii. 7.

(4.) Another subject for angelic investigation, as connected with the sufferings of Christ, is this—the *greatness of the Divine love*. They knew that God was Love; for their own creation and happiness testified to His goodness. But that God's love should be proof against rebellion—this was a new revelation of His character. Angels that sinned were condemned at once and for ever. But when man sinned, this love triumphed over ingratitude, and vanquished disobedience. The love of God to man—how it must have astonished angels! Christ took not on Him their nature, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Great mystery of love to man! The humiliation, the sorrows, the death of the Saviour, are all gathered up into the one word—“Love.” “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” “Greater love,” said Jesus, “hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his *friends*.”<sup>1</sup> But we were *enemies*, ill-doing and hell-deserving, guilty and graceless, hateful and hating, when “He who was rich, for our sakes be-

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 10; John xv. 13.

came poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." Here indeed was "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;" a love seen nowhere else in the same unspeakable greatness, and which the angels might worthily desire "to look into."

(5.) Angels also "desire to look into" *the glory that should follow*. Reasonably so; for there is an intimate connection between "the sufferings of Christ and the glory" which flowed from His cross. And so, after describing His humiliation, the apostle adds, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."<sup>1</sup>

Again, St. Paul says, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."<sup>2</sup> The glory that was given to Christ after His ascension was, as angels know, not conferred on

<sup>1</sup> Phil. ii. 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

Him in His Divine nature, but in His mediatorial character. As God He could not be further exalted ; but as "the Man Christ Jesus" He could be raised "above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."<sup>1</sup> "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour."<sup>2</sup>

Christ is the object of universal worship in heaven. On Him all eyes are fixed ; to His praise all harps are tuned ; at His feet, once nailed to the cross, thousands of glittering crowns are cast, as the purchase of His blood and the gift of His grace, and thousands of voices are loudly proclaiming : "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!"

Christ has "all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth." He rules the universe ; all events are under His control. Angels now see placed in those hands that were once pierced with nails, the sceptre

<sup>1</sup> Eph. i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ii. 9.

of universal empire. "The government" is "on His shoulder;" the keys of rule are at His girdle; He "openeth, and no man shutteth; He shutteth, and no man openeth;" by Him "kings reign, and princes decree justice;" "none can stay His hand, or say, What doest Thou?" "He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of earth."

Again, Christ in glory is "the Head over all things to His church." The church is "His body," His fulness. It consists of all true believers, of the saints of all denominations, of sheep gathered from many folds, of members "redeemed out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." As Head of His church, Jesus is the source of its life; this spiritual life He maintains by continual supplies of grace from above. "Our life is hid with Christ in God."

And Jesus has not only purchased life for His people here and hereafter, but has pledged Himself that "all things" shall "work together" for their good,—joy and sorrow, health and sickness, prosperity and adversity, gains and losses. What a precious privilege is this!

And what a thought, too, that in "the glory" which followed "the sufferings of Christ," His believing people are to share. It was that He might "bring many sons unto glory," that He was made "perfect through suffering." Not for His own sake was the cross endured, and the shame despised, and the glory won; but for ours. Speaking to the Father, He says, "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. . . . Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."<sup>1</sup>

Angels "desire to look into" the glory, but they have no share in it; He died not on their behalf, but on ours. It is we who know "the fellowship of His sufferings," that shall know "the power of His resurrection."

Into "the glory" that flows from His sufferings angels are "looking" still. For "the eternal purpose of God which He purposed in Christ Jesus" is not yet completed. "The mystery of redemption is not

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 22-24.

yet finished." Angels are watching, as we are, the signs of the times, and the fulfilment of prophetic announcements, that they may gather something about the approach of the season when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven to take unto Himself His great power and glory, and to reign as "King of kings and Lord of lords." For from angels as well as men is hidden the day and the hour when the Saviour cometh. So that angels are still "looking into the glory" that is to be revealed; perhaps longing with ourselves for the day of the manifestation of the sons of God; when the graves shall give up their dead, and death shall be swallowed up in victory, and new heavens and a new earth shall rise from the ruin of the old; when shall be "heard the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

Christian brethren, are we to be partakers in this glory? Has it been purchased for us by the "agony and bloody sweat, and cross and passion," of God's dear and only Son? Then I charge you to give to your Saviour the first place in your hearts. Place

Him on the throne of your affections. Let Him reign in your thoughts, your lives, your hearts. Love Him best; serve Him first; and, leaving all, follow Him "through good report and evil report; through honour and dishonour; through life unto death; through death into heaven!"

Yet a little while, and His glory now hidden shall be revealed. "He will come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." The grave shall give up its dead. "Every enemy shall be put under His feet." Satan shall be bound, and cast into the bottomless pit. The wicked shall be driven away like chaff from His presence. "Death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire." The saints shall inherit the earth; and the world throughout its length and breadth, being turned into the seat of Jesus' kingdom, and the witness of His glory, the gladdening acclamation of millions, rising from every hill, and plain, and mountain, and valley, shall respond to the "great voice heard in heaven," saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."

VII.

ANGELS TAUGHT.

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church & manifold wisdom of God."

E.P.H. iii. 10.



## Angels Taught.

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**ONE** objection to the Gospel has been based upon the insignificance of our world. "It is too small," say some, "for such a vast interposition on the part of God." What is our planet amongst all the systems that are scattered over infinite space! Our globe is greatly surpassed in size by other planets, and by the sun round which it revolves.

The magnitude of the universe, it is said, is opposed to the Gospel story of God's interposition for the redemption of our little world. When the objector looks upward to the vaulted skies, "clothed in the beauty of ten thousand stars," he exclaims, with other meaning than that of David: "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the

moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained ; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him ?”<sup>1</sup>

The objection is a shallow one ; for when we remember how mind is greater than matter, and the immortal soul grander than the material creation, we must acknowledge that man is not too low for that manifestation of thought and care which has been lavished upon him by God. The mind that can tell the stars, and calculate their distances, and discover their laws, must be nobler than the stars themselves ; and the soul that shall exist when the material universe has perished, must be greater than the physical creation, subject as it is to change and decay.

“ Man,” says Pascal, “ is a feeble reed, trembling in the midst of creation ; but then he is endowed with thought. It does not need the universe to arm for his destruction,—a breath of wind, a drop of water, will suffice to kill him. But, though the universe were to fall on man, and crush him, he would be greater in his death than the universe in its victory ;

<sup>1</sup> Psa. viii. 3, 4.

for he would be conscious of his defeat, and it would not be conscious of its triumph. The soul of man, immortal as it is—gifted with a life which runs on parallel with the life of God—must give him a dignity and a place in creation not occupied by the most brilliant constellation that shines in space.”

Augustine truly remarks, “There is but one object in creation greater than the soul, and that one its Creator;” and if so, shall we not believe that the wise and loving God will not think it beneath Him to visit man when fallen, and make provision for his restoration to the place which he lost through sin? If it was worthy of God to create man at the first, it is surely worthy of God to interfere for his redemption. And this the Gospel tells us He has done.

And in this great act of restorative love all heaven feels the profoundest interest. It is into the marvellous way in which God carries out His purpose of mercy that “angels desire to look;” it is over the repenting sinner that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God.”

The church, elect and redeemed, is represented by

St. Paul as being a school for angels : from it "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" learn lessons about God which they are taught nowhere else. How this exalts and elevates in our thoughts the grand plan of redeeming love ! When angels wish to learn the attributes of God, they turn away from creation, its shining suns and lofty mountains, and meditate on "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that shall follow ;" they look to the triumphs that spring from that cross where "mercy and truth met together ; righteousness and peace kissed each other." This is a truth bound up in the remarkable statement of the apostle : "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

What meaneth the expression "church" ? "Is known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." There are two different aspects of what is called the church. There is the visible, or professing church, embracing all that participate in Christian ordinances, and the invisible church, formed of that inner company of believers "who worship God in spirit and in

truth," and have the true circumcision of the heart. "For all are not Israel that are of Israel." The church of which the apostle speaks is that "blessed company of all faithful people" who have been "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world," and who, in the fulness of time, were redeemed by the precious blood of the cross; and who, in God's far-seeing purpose of mercy, have been born into the world that they might be born again of the Spirit, and become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. This church is called the body of Christ: "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." It is the complement of His mystical person.

The church is also styled a temple. St. Paul, addressing the Corinthian Christians, says: "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."<sup>1</sup> It is also "a spiritual house," built on Christ alone, composed of living stones fitly framed together for an habitation of God through the Spirit, and growing into an holy temple in the Lord. All the members of this

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 16.

church are really and essentially one. They are grafted as living branches into the living and "true Vine." They may be scattered among all nations, and dispersed among all sections of the visible church, but as true believers they are essentially one body in Him their Head,—one body with all those blessed ones of all generations who have entered into rest, and are now reposing in the paradise of God.

This is the church which shall at the second advent of the Redeemer be perfected in glory, and "presented faultless before the throne with exceeding joy." For this is the church of which St. Paul speaks in the words: "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."<sup>1</sup>

And this is the church by which—in its redemption from sin and restoration to holiness—is "made

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 25-27.

known unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God."

(1.) This statement assures us that the wisdom manifested in the work of redemption surpasses the wisdom manifested in the works of creation. How this assertion magnifies the loving work of the cross! For in creation what proofs there are of wisdom and of skill, not only in the brilliant skies studded thick with stars, but in this lower world, with its varied forms of animate and inanimate existence. The wisdom of God is seen, not only in its higher, but in its lower works,—not only in flaming suns, and wandering comets, and rolling planets; but in the wing of the bird that cleaves the air; the fin of the fish that swims through the deep; the petal of the flower that blooms in the field; and in the light of the glow-worm that shines on the bank. Evidences of a designing Mind are everywhere, in the humblest, as well as in the highest works of God. And yet some of those who claim the name of philosopher at the present day deny this, and propound theories which exclude an ever-ruling Mind from the universe.

They refer all the wonders of creation to some strange theory of evolution. According to them there is no personal God. They "discover in matter every quality and force of life." And these are men living in a Christian land, and amid the full blaze of gospel light! Are they not bringing the title of philosopher into contempt, and making the name "scientific man" almost synonymous with that of the "fool" who "said in his heart, There is no God?" A heathen rebukes their folly, and puts them to shame. Listen to the words of Cicero: "The man who believes this (that the world with all its beauty, with all its fittedness for man, as well as for animal and vegetable life, was made by the chance meeting of atoms), will believe that if a countless number of the letters of the alphabet—their material being either gold or anything else—were thrown as a mass into some place,—from these letters shaken out on to the ground there can be formed the 'annals' of Ennius arranged in such order as to be read continually."<sup>1</sup>

It was well said by one, in answer to an atheist,

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, "*De Natura Deorum*," (ii. 37.)

who calmly and deliberately wrote down his unbelief on paper, that "the very feather with which he penned the words, 'There is no God,' refuted the audacious lie." Truly creation is filled with proofs of the wisdom of God. "The heavens declare His glory, and the firmament showeth His handywork."

But though this is the case, yet are greater proofs to be found of God's wisdom, in the salvation of His people, than in the unbounded fields of the universe. Angels—when they would search into the character of the Godhead—turn away their eyes from nature's magnificent temple, and look with eager gaze into the mysteries of redemption, whence they would gather lessons of the transcendent wisdom of Jehovah. That such is the case must be concluded from the apostle's statement, "That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the *manifest* wisdom of God."

(2.) Let us examine in what manner the manifold wisdom of God is made known by the church, "to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

Whilst we are taught elsewhere that the angels take a deep interest in redemption ; from this Scripture we learn that their knowledge and happiness are increased by the manifestation of the glory of God in the salvation of the sinner. It is not "wisdom" merely, but "the manifold wisdom of God," that is thus made known to them. They knew the wisdom of God from other sources. They had been created in purity, and holiness, and bliss, to live in the light of the Divine throne, and to gather in knowledge at the fountain-head. They knew by blessed experience the happiness of serving God : of "doing His commandments," and "hearkening unto the voice of His word." They had learnt a lesson of God's holiness in the expulsion of their fallen companions from heaven, and the tremendous judgments with which the devil and his angels were visited, when they rebelled against the Most High. They had seen the creation of this planet ; and as it rose in beauty under the hand of the Creator, these "morning stars sang together," these "sons of God shouted for joy." They watched the creation of man, so "fearfully and wonderfully made ;" they

saw how the subtle element of life was "breathed into his nostrils, . . . and man became a living soul." And when Adam and Eve, made after the moral image of God, and in His likeness, were placed in the garden of the Lord's planting, they may have supposed them destined to a long futurity of unsullied purity, and blessedness, and joy. And then came the fall of man, carrying desolation into Eden. The guilty pair stood trembling before their Maker; nor was there an angel in heaven who may not have expected to see the same vengeance overtake the transgressors that had punished the sinful members of their own celestial body. But such was not the design of Jehovah. "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," He resolved to save an election according to grace; and in bringing many sons unto glory, to make known His whole character, and to give expression to the depths of love, and holiness, and wisdom, and justice, and power, that as yet lay concealed in His character. And mercy to the guilty was now for the first time to be revealed as a perfection of the blessed God.

So even in the hour when man fell, and the world was lost, and Satan triumphed, God cheered the hearts of our first parents by the promise of the woman's seed, who should bruise the serpent's head, and "destroy" both "death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." The Divine purpose was unfolded as the years rolled on; type and sacrifice prefigured the great Deliverer; promise and prophecy spoke of Him; and angels were often sent to the earth on errands of pity and love. Still the mystery of redemption was hidden from ages and generations; and as prophets "testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," angels "desired to look into" these things, and to understand the yet unrevealed wonders of salvation.

At last "the fulness of time" arrived; and Jehovah, the Second Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, took man's nature unto Himself, and was born of a pure virgin. Then, on this morning of joy, when the Godhead was enshrined in flesh, angels hovering with wings of light over the cradle in Bethlehem, made the heavens ring with their

hymn of praise. "The mystery, hid for ages" in the Eternal Mind, and of which only dim and shadowy notices had been vouchsafed, was now suddenly made clear. "The wisdom"—"the manifold wisdom of God"—now shone forth more pre-eminently than it had ever done before. For through the obedience and sufferings of Christ Jesus, harmony was established amongst the apparently conflicting attributes of Jehovah; and on the cross, where Jesus made satisfaction for sin, "mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other." Thus redemption glorifies all the Divine perfections, satisfies the justice of God, exalts His holiness, preserves His truth, illustrates His mercy, and magnifies His love. No wonder that Christ is called by the apostle "the wisdom of God,"—seeing that His atoning work shed a lustre over all the perfections of God, whilst it met all the necessities of man.

The mystery of salvation is now solved, and an answer given to the all-important question: "How shall man be just with God?" Is not "manifold wisdom" pre-eminently shown in devising a plan

which made the sinner's salvation consistent with God's honour; which exalted no one attribute of the high and holy One at the expense of another; nor made Him unjust in order that He might be merciful: a plan through which He appears to the eyes of the whole intelligent universe, "just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus?"

And if it be in Christ crucified that angels acquaint themselves with God; if it be not in sun or stars, but in the blood-stained cross of Calvary, and its results, that the varied attributes of Deity blend and shine,—then can we understand the apostle's statement, "that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

(3.) There are various other aspects under which "the manifold wisdom of God" is displayed through the church. It is seen, not only in the work of the Redeemer, but in His person, in which were combined two natures—the human to suffer, the Divine to satisfy — a "Daysman," such as the patriarch desired: God's Fellow, and man's Friend, able to lay His hand on both, and to reconcile the estranged.

This " manifold wisdom " is also seen in the operations of the Holy Ghost, who renews man in the spirit of his mind ; makes him a new creature ; turns the heart of stone into a heart of flesh ; creates life under the ribs of death, and translates him from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

This " wisdom " is also seen in the preservation of the church, and in bringing every saint to glory. No easy task this, when we consider the sins to be forgiven, the temptations to be vanquished, the difficulties to be overcome, and the enemies from within and from without that oppose our entrance into heaven. But God is sufficient for the work He has undertaken. His eternal purpose which He has purposed in Christ Jesus cannot be baffled or defeated ; nothing can loosen one link of that golden chain which binds the believer to His throne : neither man nor devil can break one. " Whom He did predestinate, them He also called : and whom He called, them He also justified ; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Thus the church is safe in Christ ; the living stones cannot be detached from the founda-

tion ; they are all “growing up into a holy temple in the Lord ;” and the time is approaching when “the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth, with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it ;” and the spiritual temple shall stand forth, the greatest wonder of the universe, and the brightest glory of God. And then, when the mystery of redemption shall be accomplished, and the great voice heard in heaven, saying, “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ ;” and the bride, arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, wedded in eternal espousals to the Lamb, sits down with her Beloved at the marriage banquet ; and when “the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings,” celebrate the glad event, then still from the church in her glory shall angels learn further lessons in the Divine ways ; and throughout the ages it will be true that “unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places shall be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

An important thought arises from the whole subject,—the unspeakable greatness of salvation. How

shall we measure the value of salvation? how declare its priceless worth? To angels it stands amongst the other wonders of God alone, without a parallel. It is the subject of their meditation, the object of their inquiries. This is the theme of their praises in heaven,—their song in the courts above is, "Salvation to God that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb." The Lamb slain is the object of their adoration, for they see in Him the Divine righteousness vindicated, the Divine mercy exalted, the law of God honoured, and the love of God having the freest exercise, the fullest scope.

If redemption has so great an interest for angels, who do not personally share in its blessings, what shall be our condemnation if our hearts are cold to the theme, or if we are indifferent to Him who purchased salvation with His blood? "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" We cannot escape, we do not deserve to escape. Hell, with all its untold wretchedness, is not a punishment too great for those who reject a Saviour's love, and "crucify Christ afresh, putting Him to an open shame."

May this not be the experience of any one of my

readers. Give yourselves, I pray you, heart and soul, to the Lord. Vie with angels in their love ; emulate their interest in " the manifold wisdom of God." Surpass them in praises of " the unsearchable riches of Christ." Living to His honour now on earth, you shall hereafter come " to an innumerable company of angels," and with them sing the new song : " Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!" Amen and Amen!



VIII.

ANGELS MINISTERING.

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

HEB. i. 14.



## Angels Ministering.

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**T**HE apostle draws a striking contrast between Christ and angels. He is the Son ; they are servants. He is seated on the throne ; they wait before His footstool. He is the Creator ; they are creatures. He is the Sender ; they the sent. He formed them for His use : He made them for His pleasure. “ For by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers : all things were created by Him and for Him ; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.” He is exalted to a measureless height above them, and is “ seated at God’s own right hand far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name

that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." To which of the angels did God say at any time, "Sit on My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" They all bow down to worship Him. They veil their faces before His dazzling lustre, as they cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts: the whole earth is full of Thy glory."

It was in this attitude of prostrate adoration that Isaiah beheld the shining seraphim, when he saw Christ's glory, and spake of Him. They not only worship Him, but they are "flames of fire" in His service; they not only wait upon the Saviour, but they attend upon the saved. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

In what does their ministration consist? What help do they afford us, and how do they afford it?

We know how they befriended the saints of ancient times. In the Old Testament we see them ministering to the faithful,—meeting them in the fields; going into their houses; now flashing upon them suddenly as a beam of light, and again as suddenly withdrawn.

They talk to Abraham under the shadow of the tent-door; they hasten Lot out of Sodom; they pass up and down the bright ladder which Jacob sees in his vision; they meet Gideon on the threshing-floor, and, banishing despair from his heart, assure him of victory; they bring food to Elijah when he flies from the face of Jezebel; and an angel descends on swift wings from heaven, in answer to Daniel's prayer, to reveal to him the purposes of God.

In the New Testament they are seen again and again, and minister to Christ and His disciples. They appear at the Saviour's birth, and fill the night with songs of joy. All through His life they wait upon Him,—in His temptation, comforting; in His agony, strengthening His tried and fainting soul. At His resurrection an angel descends from heaven to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre; and when Mary Magdalene comes to seek the living among the dead, she finds two of these loving ministers "sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John xx. 12.

Apostles, too, have their attendant spirits, who help them in their hour of need. They open prison doors, and bid them go forth and preach the words of life; they smite the chains from their limbs, and lead them out to liberty. When St. Paul was shipwrecked on his voyage to Rome, and he and all the ship's company were on the very brink of a watery grave, the angel of the Lord stands by him, and cheers his heart with the glad assurance, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."<sup>1</sup>

And have we any reason to believe that this angelic ministry continues until this day? Most assuredly we have. Though we see them not, though we hear them not, though we cannot sensibly realize their presence, yet are we privileged to believe that angels still encamp round about the righteous; still "bear them up in their hands, lest at any time they dash their foot against a stone." "Take heed," says Christ, "that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvii. 24.

heaven.”<sup>1</sup> I believe that angelic ministration is as real a thing to us as it was to the saints of old, even though it be less a matter of sight and more a matter of faith.

The church in the olden time was in a state of childhood, and was dealt with as we deal with our children. It was taught by pictures, and signs, and wonders; it was impressed through the senses; it needed to be instructed through the eye and the ear: through visible objects and audible sounds. But we, under the Gospel economy, have reached a higher state,—we are now in our manhood, and as men have “put away childish things.” “We walk by faith, not by sight.” We have passed into a dispensation of spiritual truth and spiritual power. No miracles are wrought before our eyes; no men, moved by the Holy Ghost, announce Divine revelations in our ears; no visible Christ invites us to lay down our heads on His breast. To us belongs the promise, “Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.” And just as in the Saviour we have One always near, although unseen, so in angels we have guardian

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 10.

attendants, though not perceived ; for they are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

In what manner do they "minister to the heirs of salvation?" Not much is revealed to us on this point,—nothing very definite is made known. Still do we find that, though they come to us no longer in visible shape,—with faces bright with love, and voices rich with heaven's music,—though they no longer enter our houses, or meet us on our way, yet do they help us as really and as actually as they did God's people in olden time. While we are struggling in Christ's name against sin, and relying on His help to overcome, we are surrounded by invisible forms who watch us with interest, and who are near in our times of peril, of weakness, and of doubt, to shield us from danger, and to strengthen and support. When we are weary, they cast around us some of the brightness of heaven ; when we are in trouble, they may perchance recall to the mind some comfortable passage of the word of God ; thus lightening and cheering the thoughts of the inner man by refreshing and invigorating the very springs of the hidden life. Was it

not thus that angels gladdened the hearts of the sorrowing women at the sepulchre?—"Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen; remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee."

And may not they be our remembrancers too? In some hour of temptation or trial, may it not be they who bring to the mind a verse of Scripture suited to our circumstances, and fitted to our need? Sometimes when we are in doubt and difficulty, perplexed or bewildered, there will flash upon the mind an appropriate promise, which at once carries with it peace and gladness. To what is this sudden recurrence of the "word in season" due? To the agency, perhaps, of those "ministering spirits" who wait on the "heirs of salvation." Is this fanciful? I think not. Do not evil angels suggest base and defiling thoughts? Are not those invasions of the soul by what is blasphemous and impure called in Scripture "fiery darts of the wicked one?" Is it not expressly said of the devil that he is "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience?"

If wicked spirits have such power over the thoughts

for evil, why should we question that good angels may have as great influence over us for good, or that they call up suggestions and remembrances that are heavenly and pure? "I doubt not," says the saintly Rutherford, "but good angels suggest good counsels, tender holy motives, offer pious thoughts; yea, refresh the often-parched spirits of gracious men with inward joy."

I would not in the least infringe upon the truth that the Spirit of God is the Being who infuses into us the principle of Divine life, and that He only is able to subdue our wills, to penetrate the deepest secrets of our hearts, and to purify and cleanse the soul. But does it infringe in any degree on the office of the Holy Ghost to suppose that good angels may, and often do, as instruments of the Divine goodness, powerfully operate on our fancy and imagination, and thereby prompt us to such thoughts and actions as are pleasing to God? Though our Lord had "the Spirit given to Him without measure;" though "in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" yet was it through angels that strength was imparted to Him in the wilderness, and consolation in the

garden. That we do not see the angels, or hear their voices ; that they do not come into our houses, or talk to us by the way, is no more an argument against their suggesting good counsels and pious thoughts, than our not seeing Christ is an argument against His intercession, or our not seeing the Spirit is an argument against His indwelling.

But whatever be the difficulty in realizing the presence of angels, there is something gladdening in the thought that whilst evil spirits try to assault and hurt the soul, these heavenly beings, by silent whisperings, by flashing sudden suggestions, by stirring up dormant memories, act as the instruments of God's grace, and minister comfort and encouragement to the " heirs of salvation."

So again with the truth of God's ever-watchful providence. It is delightful to know that God Himself is "about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways." Nothing can be more comforting than the assurance that the Divine Being has "numbered the hairs of our head;" that "He putteth our tears into His bottle;" that "He maketh all our bed in our sickness;" but it does

not lessen our consolation to believe that angels are His ministers to carry out His intentions of love and mercy on our behalf. "Encamping round about the righteous," they marshal themselves for their protection, and use their vast powers in promoting their good. Though so lofty in nature, and sublime in endowments, they discharge offices on our behalf which, as measured against their greatness, appear but trivial and insignificant; for they "hold up the righteous, and keep him in all his ways, lest he hurt his foot against a stone." There is great comfort in this. These lofty beings,—principalities and powers of the invisible world,—turning their thoughts from the rise and fall of empires, employ their glorious powers in waiting on the heirs of salvation, and in ministering to their good, as they walk the world with God.

It is also a joy to know that they who tend us in life will be near us when the "silver cord is" about to be "loosed, the golden bowl to be broken," and will be ready to receive the disembodied soul, and transport it from earth to heaven. When Lazarus died, he "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

So it is still. Angels gather round the dying beds of believers, waiting until the spirit be set free, that they may bear their charge with songs to its Father's home. Which of us has not heard of saints who in their last moments had visions of angels,—glimpses of bright faces, and caught strains of richest music, just as heaven was opening its doors to let them in? It has seemed as if some messenger had whispered in their ears: "The Master is come, and calleth for thee;" for their lips have parted to speak the joyful answer: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

It is with dying believers often as it was with Christian and Hopeful in the great allegory. "These two men were, as it were, in heaven before they came to it; being swallowed up with the sight of angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here they had also the city in view, and thought they heard all the bells therein to ring to welcome them thereto."

We too often think of death as a lonely exit from the world: a sudden breaking up of all family ties; a mysterious passage into an unknown country where all will be unfamiliar and strange. But, in reality,

it is for the heirs of salvation simply a going home ; an entrance into the Father's house ; a passing into the happy presence of the Elder Brother ; a conscious fellowship with the family above.

Blessed indeed are they for whom death, having lost its sting, is lightened by angel-presences and angel-whispers ; who, "falling asleep in Jesus," are "carried by angels" to the very bosom of God, and who in their own experience can give a practical answer to the question : "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Who are they on whose behalf the ministry of angels is thus carried on?

"Those who shall be heirs of salvation:" of that salvation which had its origin in the eternal depths of the Divine love, has been wrought out by the sufferings and righteousness of the Divine Son, and applied by the indwelling power of the Divine Spirit.

Heirs of salvation ! No wonder that angels watch over you ; for ye are the children of the Most High, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-

heirs with Christ. "If children!" If *not* children, we have neither part nor lot in this matter.

My friends, are *you* the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus? Are you "walking in love, as dear children;" rejoicing in the conscious assurance of forgiveness, and serving God in "the beauties of holiness?" Then see what privileges are yours. Whatever be your condition or circumstances, young or old, learned or unlearned, rich or poor, prince or peasant, — angels are "sent forth to minister unto" you, for you are amongst the "heirs of salvation."

And this ministry is not a ministry of necessity, but of sympathy. They delight to watch over the fortunes of those whom the Saviour purchased with His blood. Angels are watching you with more than fraternal love. They have watched over you from the beginning. When you first repented of your sins, and came with broken and contrite hearts to God, they made all heaven ring with songs of joy. And now they attend you with royal state; they wait upon your steps; they render you all kindly and sympathising service.

One caution needs to be given when dealing with the subject of angelic ministrations. Let us beware of a superstitious perversion and abuse of this doctrine. The Church of Rome puts angels in a false position as mediators; her members being taught to invoke their aid, and to rely on their intercession. The warning of the apostle comes in here: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up, by his fleshly mind."<sup>1</sup> There is but the "One Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

When St. John, in the Apocalypse, fell at the feet of the angel to worship him, he shrank from the act of adoration—"See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God."<sup>2</sup> Glorify and praise Him; He alone is worthy of our worship. He is the "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Angels but form His retinue, and are His willing servants, doing His commandments, and hearkening to the voice of His word.

<sup>1</sup> Col. ii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xix. 10.

Shall the master worship the servant? The heirs bow down to the attendants? I trow not. Christ has given us a position higher than angels. Those who are accounted worthy to attain the world of glory, not only equal, but excel in honour the highest spirits in heaven. They shall have authority over other orders of being. As the Bride of the Lamb, they shall have a share in Christ's crown, and a seat on Christ's throne, and with Him shall reign for ever and ever.

And as angels are ministering spirits to them in their pilgrimage through the world to heaven, so angels shall attend them as their messengers when heaven has been gained. "Know ye not," asks St. Paul of the Christians at Corinth, "that we shall judge angels?" and his words may mean nothing less than this, — that we shall be invested with royalty over the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

Brethren, beloved in the Lord, such being our privilege, such our high calling of God in Christ Jesus, what manner of persons ought we to be? Surely, as citizens of the heavenly world, we should

wear upon our brow the impress of the kingdom of God; letting men see that we are the redeemed of the Lord; and proving to angels that we are doing on earth that will which they are doing in heaven. Speak, think, and act, then, as becometh those who are partakers of the Divine nature—for whom Christ died, and to whom angels minister. Live as the angels of God are living; who, though they see what you only believe, and possess what you only hope for, yet have never had such a manifestation of the Divine goodness as has been manifested to you; and who may well learn from man, redeemed by the blood of the cross, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of a love which passeth knowledge, and whose greatness would for ever have remained unknown, had not Christ died on Calvary as an atonement for sin.

May we, the "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," emulate the obedience, the willing service of those bright angelic beings, concerning whom the apostle inquires: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

IX.

THE CHERUBIM.

“So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

· GEN. iii. 24.



## The Cherubim.

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**T**HE third chapter of the Bible has been well called "the basis and groundwork of revelation." It tells us where we are, and from whence we came; how sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and it reveals, if not the origin of evil, at least its entrance upon this earth. Disclosing the history of man's transgression, it partially lifts the curtain from the scene of the fall. Our first parents disobeyed the simple command of God, and were expelled from the tree of life and the garden of Eden. "And the Lord God placed at the east of the garden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

This first mention of the cherubim is unaccompanied by any description of their nature and ap-

pearance ; and we may therefore assume that they who lived in Moses' time were familiar with the cherubic form.

The appearance of the cherubim varies in Scripture. The cherubim seen by Ezekiel beneath the throne of God have each four faces and four wings ; while the cherubim carved upon the walls of his temple have only two faces. The "living things" or cherubim of the Apocalypse are represented as a fourfold creaturehood, each having a face different from the other, and "full of eyes before and behind." "The first living thing was like a lion ; and the second like a calf ; and the third had a face as a man ; and the fourth was like a flying eagle." They had six wings, and were full of eyes within. The cherubim were therefore composite figures, with a prominence given in their representation to the shape and lineaments of man. It is said in Ezekiel that "they had the appearance of a man ;" and in Revelation that "they had the face of a man." Humanity is thus linked to all that is highest in the animal creation, — to the strength of the lion, the patient industry of the ox, and the soaring flight of the eagle. So that we

have in the cherubic forms a representation of man, in which he is invested not only with moral and intellectual powers, but with the highest physical qualities of the noblest animal existences.

And why this combination of the human face with other creaturely forms? To show that creaturely position, and ministerial service of the most exalted and honourable kind, are the attributes of the cherubim. They are always represented as being in the nearest relationship to God, and as stationed where God's holiness more especially dwells. They stand at the gate of Eden, ministers of God's judgment; they bend in adoring contemplation over the ark of the covenant, looking toward the mercy-seat,—the dwelling-place of the great King; they appear in the midst of the rainbow-circled throne, in the very presence of Him "who to look upon is like a jasper and a sardine stone."

But why were the cherubim, ideal representations of humanity in its highest forms, placed at the east of Eden? That man in his expulsion might be taught that there was mercy as well as judgment with God. The cherubim with the flaming sword were symbols of faith and hope, as well as of terror and dread.

“When the eye of man looked to the sword with its burnished and fiery aspect, he could not but be struck with awe at the thought of God’s severe and retributive justice. But when he saw at the same time, in near and friendly connection with that emblem of Jehovah’s righteousness, living and life-like forms of being, cast pre-eminently in his own mould, but having along with his the likeness also of the choicest species of the animal creation around him, what could he think but that still for creatures of earthly rank, for himself most of all, an interest was reserved by the mercy of God in the things that pertained to the blessed region of life? That region could not now, by reason of sin, be actually possessed by him; but it was provisionally held by composite forms of creature life in which his nature appeared as the predominating element.”

Why should man despair? The garden had not been swept away from the creation; the tree of life had not been rooted up; the garden and the tree were not entrusted to other orders of being, but were given into the keeping of creatures of earthly form, and wearing a benign human face. There was hope, therefore, that the Paradise lost

might be regained ; that there would be a restoration of the exiles to the happy home and blissful bowers from which they had been driven. And we may see goodness as well as severity in the fact that when " God drove out the man, He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

Such, I think, is the true explanation of the cherubim. They were not angels, as they are generally regarded ; but they were human symbols, and are associated with the church redeemed and presented faultless before the throne of God. If the cherubim are not angels, the subject may not, with strict accuracy, be included in a series of papers on angelic ministration ; but as they are usually spoken of as angels, it may be considered legitimate, and there is in it much material for profitable consideration.

In dealing with the theme of man's expulsion from Eden, let us endeavour to gain a just idea of the position of Adam when he was created and placed in the garden of the Lord's planting. This creature whom God had " made in His own image," and had

appointed lord of the earth and its inhabitants, was endowed with everything requisite for the development of his nature and the fulfilment of his destiny. In Paradise he found his rightful place,—the place of free and happy subjection to his Maker. He was made to feel his dependence, and to recognize his responsibility. He was under law. There was a covenant, and there were the sacraments of a covenant—the pledges of its reality. These were two,—“the tree of life,” and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” “The tree of life” was the sacrament—the sign and seal of the thing promised or guaranteed by God, namely, “eternal life.” “The tree of knowledge of good and evil” was the sign and seal of the thing required, namely, “perfect obedience,” to be tested and proved by abstinence from a single specified act.

Thus in Paradise man had an outward and visible pledge and token, both of the blessing promised, and of the terms on which it was promised. By the tree of life he was reminded continually of his dependence on God. He had no life in himself,—he received it from Him in whom alone is life ; and of this derived life his continual participation of “the tree of life”

was a standing symbol. Again, he was reminded by "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" of what was *his* part in the covenant,—of the terms on which he as a tenant held the garden from God. This tree, suggesting the possibility of evil through disobedience, would ratify to him, on compliance with the law of God, his enjoyment of the life of God; or it would be the occasion of his sin and his death.

Such was the original position of man in respect of his Maker; a position of grateful dependence, where he had but a slight temptation to disobedience; where he had also the fullest scope for delighting in God, admiring His works, and enjoying His gifts.

But let us turn from this happy scene to the tempter, the temptation, and the fall.

"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made."

The agent in the temptation was the evil spirit, under the form of the serpent,—that creature "more subtle than any beast of the field." The apostle, warning us against the malice of the coming foe, who "goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," has these words: "But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his subtilty,

so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Choosing, in his craftiness, the weaker of the two human beings, the cunning tempter addresses to her the first suggestion of evil. In the form of an inquiry on the subject of the Creator's regulations, he insinuates a doubt regarding the goodness of God, and as to the liberality of His gifts: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Can it be? Has He really placed you under so unreasonable a restraint? Instead of repelling the insinuation, the woman allows the suggestion to take effect, and a causeless suspicion to rankle in her mind. When she describes the liberal gift which God had made, she does so in a way to detract from its generosity. "We *may* eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." What an unworthy way of stating the largeness of the grant which God had made! for He had said: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." She narrows the permission, and magnifies the restriction, and seems to think that nothing is granted whilst something is withheld. Alas! Do not all of us in this follow the example of our mother Eve? Are we not disposed to think little of the blessings

that God gives, and much of those that He withholds? If He denies us the fruit of one tree only, while He gives us freely to eat of all the rest, the one enjoyment, because withheld, is coveted; the manifold mercies, because freely given, are lightly esteemed. Let us beware of such a tone and temper of mind, and of thinking little of the mercies which we have, or hankering after those which we have not; for by allowing ourselves to doubt the Divine goodness, and by cherishing jealous suspicions of His love, we are most assuredly preparing ourselves for a fall.

But we not only trace in Eve a disposition to depreciate God's permission to "eat freely of every tree of the garden," but also a desire to exaggerate His prohibition not to "eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil." She magnifies the command into an intolerable hardship. "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it." She implies that God had forbidden them to touch the fruit, though this does not appear from the words of God Himself. We should gather from Eve's account of the prohibition, that God had

guarded the tree with such jealous care that His command extended to other senses besides that of taste. And yet, while it might have been prudent not to touch the fruit, nay, not even to look at the forbidden thing, no such restriction was imposed. It was Eve herself who exaggerated the prohibition. Alas! the same spirit is in us still. There are some who insinuate that religion is all harshness and gloom, and that God is a hard task-master. On the contrary, "God hath given us all things richly to enjoy;" it is only the abuse, not the use, of the world which He hath forbidden. He only deters us from things which bring shame, and dissatisfaction, and remorse,—from the wasted life, the weakened powers, the regretful memory; from the thorns that sin plants in the dying pillow; and from the death that can never die. Let us believe this. Accepting every restraint He lays upon us, and remembering the dignity of that "image" and "likeness" in which we were first made, let us "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called;" and cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfect holiness in the fear of God."

But Eve not only depreciates God's permission,

and exaggerates His prohibition ; she also softens down the Divine threatening. God had said, "Thou shalt not eat of it ; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." But what is her version of this strong and unqualified declaration ? "Ye shall not eat of it *lest* ye die." "Lest ye die." An expression which implies a doubtful peradventure ; a vague and indefinite warning that might be braved ; an uncertain risk that might be run. Of this incipient unbelief Satan knew well how to avail himself. Answering the thought in her heart, he said with malicious cunning, "Ye shall not surely die ;" adding, as a motive to transgression, "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." "There is nothing new under the sun." How many are resting their hope of salvation on the baseless fancy that God will not make good His threatenings. Men, building on a false idea of the mercy of God, try to explain away the doctrine of His punitive justice. "God," they say, "is too compassionate ;" or, "Everlasting does not mean lasting for ever ;" or, "the fire," and "the worm," and

“the blackness of darkness,” are but figures, and do not really represent the terrible things they express. And so they trifle when they ought to tremble.

They who deny that “the wages of sin is death,” can claim no originality for the idea,—they borrow the thought from the father of lies; the devil said so before them. “Ye shall not surely die.” Is this to be believed, when God hath said, “The soul that sinneth, it *shall* die?” When Christ has said, “He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned?” When God’s word gives the solemn warning: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting?” Is there no hell here in a sinner’s heart, that men can be so very certain that there will be none hereafter? Is there no agony of remorse now? No gnawings of the worm on the conscience? Has not many a guilty wretch, in dread, and anguish, and shame, known even in this life the first scathings of “the fire that never shall be quenched?” I beseech you to believe all that God

says,—stop your ears to the lies of the devil ; and, giving all credit to those passages of Scripture which, like the walls of Belshazzar's palace, reveal God's anger against sin, flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel.

To “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,”—to this trinity of evil that tempts man to his destruction, may be ascribed the temptation and fall of Adam and his wife. There was “the lust of the flesh,” in that the fruit was desired as “good for food ;” “the lust of the eye,” in that the fruit was pleasant to the sight ; and “the pride of life,” in that it was to be desired to make one wise. In yielding to these three carnal principles, successfully called into action by the tempter, man brought ruin upon himself, and misery into the world. The immediate effects of disobedience were, a sense of shame and a dread of judgment. The guilt of sin caused shame ; the curse of sin caused fear. Shame and fear caused them to shrink from God, and to hate His appearance : so that, flying from Him whom they were wont to welcome, they sought a dark lurking-place among the trees of the garden. But though they hide themselves, there is an eye

that pierces all darkness, a voice that summons all offenders to the bar of God. And now excuses are made, which aggravate the transgression they seek to palliate. "How are the mighty fallen!" What a wreck sin has made of this once noble creature? Adam, with coward baseness, seeks to turn the anger of God on the poor trembling woman at his side. He would selfishly save himself at her expense. "The woman gave me, and I did eat." Nor is this all. He would throw part of the blame on God. "The woman *Thou gavest me.*" "The circumstances in which Thou didst place me, more than my fault, are answerable for my sin." What a bold insinuation that God was to blame in the fall! Eve, again, cast the blame on the serpent. "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."

See how shame, and fear, and falsehood, are the bitter fruits of sin. And it is ever so. The consciousness of guilt begets terror. "The wicked flee when no one pursueth." There is confusion of face, and uneasiness of heart, prompting all sorts of schemes for shunning the searching eyes, and evading the home question of the Holy One and the Just. And when God does find us out, and breaks in upon our

“refuge of lies ;” when He calls us forth from our concealment, and convinces us of sin ; to what miserable shifts and apologies have we recourse ! We cast the blame on one another. We even lay the guilt of our errors on God. We attribute sin to constitutional temperament ; or to the power of passion ; or to the suddenness of temptation. But these are but idle excuses ; they aggravate the offence, and add to our guilt. “ Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God ; for God cannot be tempted of evil ; neither tempteth He any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

And now follows the sentence. The serpent shall crawl for ever upon the ground, and eat dust mingled with its food ; between him and man there shall be perpetual war ; until at last the victory be gained by a Son of man, the devil defeated, and his power destroyed. The woman is to have a destiny of suffering : “ In sorrow ” she is to “ bring forth children ; ” her dependence and helplessness shall make her the servant of the husband whom she led into

the transgression, and subject her to his arbitrary and often capricious rule—"unto him shall be thy desire, and he shall rule over thee." The man also is to bear the punishment of sin. "The ground is cursed for his sake,"—sown with the thorn and the thistle,—labour is no longer to be light and joyous, but he is to "eat bread in the sweat of his face," until he return to the dust from which he was taken; for "sin" has "entered into the world, and death by sin."

Is there no light amid all this darkness? Yes: one bright glimmering ray, ever to wax clearer, as the centuries of toil, and sorrow, and anguish, and death wear on; until at length it reaches its full splendour in the person of One, at whose birth angels shall sing of "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; goodwill toward men." The Seed of the woman shall meet, match, and master the tempter. Beneath the "heel" of "a Man of sorrows" shall the serpent's "head" be bruised. A Son of man is to be the Saviour of men; a Goel-Redeemer is to rise up in the family of the fallen, to redeem His brethren; a Victor to appear in the house of the vanquished; and by one that is to die God will "destroy death,

and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Finally, the last consequence of the primeval sin was an exclusion from Paradise, and from the tree of life within it. "So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. The cherubim were God's ministers of righteous judgment; and with the sword of flame they guarded the way to the tree of life. They kept the way to the tree of life from the approach of man. There was mercy in this, though doubtless not at the time clear to Adam and his wife. They were *reluctantly* expelled from Eden. "God *drove out* the man." Perhaps he lingered at the gate of the garden. How shall he quit that fair and tranquil domain, and venture on an unknown world, which his own sin had sown with the brier and the thorn?

Still there was mercy as well as judgment in his being kept back by the flaming sword of the cherubim from the tree of life. If the fruit of this tree sustained the natural life, and was a security against bodily decay, how merciful in God not to suffer man to

cat of it after he had fallen. For a sinner's immortality in sinfulness must be wretchedness and misery. A race of never-dying sinners would turn this green earth into a Sodom or a hell. If there is to be a blessed immortality for man, it must be entered upon through the grave and gate of death; entered upon as a new gift of God, given only through the propitiation of a Substitute, and a resurrection from the dead.

Blessed be God for the grace that made exclusion from the garden and from the tree of life not perpetual, but temporary! Paradise had been lost by sin; but it was not lost for ever; the garden was still in the keeping of God, and of the guardian cherubim. The flaming sword was to be turned against the sinner's Substitute, and its fire to be quenched in streams of His human blood. The last Adam came to restore what the first had forfeited. By battle, and suffering, and death, He was to vanquish every assault of the tempter; and by anguish voluntarily undergone for the sin of others, He was to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. "The kingdom of heaven!" Not an earthly paradise, but a heavenly city. Or rather

would He make heaven and earth one, as in the olden time when God used to come down in the cool of the day, and walk in the garden with Adam and his wife as friend with friend. There should be a bridal of earth and sky; and two worlds should be free to man; and he should equally be a citizen of the "new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The garden and the city should equally be his home. And oh, that city, what splendours are there! "The city has twelve gates, and at the gates stand twelve angels,"<sup>1</sup> not to keep man back, but to bid him welcome once more.

No material sun lights up the firmament of the New Jerusalem; no moon silvers its night; for the glory of the ever-present Creator illumines it; darkness has no place; the noon-tide is ever at the full. It requires "no temple; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it;" and from the throne rolls the pure water of life, clear as crystal. And on the banks of this river, and in the midst of the streets of this magnificent city stands the tree of life; a tree which "bears twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month;

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxi. 12.

and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”<sup>1</sup> Would you eat of it, and live for ever? No cherubim guard *this* tree; no flaming sword bars the way of access to it; “whosoever will may come.” “The gift of God is eternal life.” The gates of the city stand open day and night; and “whosoever will” may enter in.

And if there be a battle to wage against the world, the flesh, and the devil,—not “against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers,” yet, fighting under the Captain of our salvation, we are sure to be made more than conquerors through Him that loved us. “Take unto you the whole armour of God;” fight, and the issue shall be sure. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”<sup>2</sup> And though the path of faithful obedience be narrow, and beset with difficulties, take courage as you listen to the gracious benediction: “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. ii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. xxii. 14.

x.

THE ANGEL OF THE COVENANT.

“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not: for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My Name is in Him.”

EXOD. xxiii. 20, 21.



## The Angel of the Covenant.

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**T**HAT should rebuke the general indifference that is felt on the subject of angelic agency, to think of the Scripture testimony on this interesting subject. The Bible lays open to us a universe peopled with spirits intermediate between God and man. If it assigns no time to their creation ; if it makes no distinct revelation of their nature, their attributes, their number, their character, yet is it explicit on the point of their existence, and their gracious ministry. Again and again they appear in the Old and New Testaments as " God's messengers ;" His " ministers ;" as " spirits ;" and as " flames of fire ;" " the holy ones ;" " watchers ;" and " the hosts," or " armies of God." They encamp about the righteous, comfort the sorrowful, fight for the good,

oppose the wicked, smite the ungodly, and perform the Redeemer's behests of grace and love on behalf of His purchased people.

Nor have they ever withdrawn from this world. The services they once undertook on behalf of God's children they still perform. We shall do well to realize this truth, and welcome heartily, and suitably reverence (not idolatrously worship) these our angelic friends.

I fully admit the point of Bishop Hall's words on this subject: "We come short of our duty to those blessed spirits if we entertain not in our hearts a high and venerable conceit of their wonderful majesty, glory, and greatness, and an awful acknowledgment and reverential awe of their presence; a holy joy, and confident assurance of their care and protection; and, lastly, a fear to do aught that might cause them to turn their faces in dislike from us."

But there is in the Scripture the manifestation of one Angel, who must be distinguished from all others, who is evidently no created spirit, and who appears in the Old Testament as "the Messenger

of the Lord ;” “the Angel of His Presence ;” “the Captain of the Lord’s Host.” This is none other than the Eternal Son Himself, who anticipates His incarnation, and appears for the purpose of sustaining the faith and hope of His people, and of keeping before their mind the great redemption which was to be wrought out in the fulness of time. Sometimes, indeed, it seems doubtful whether the Divine Being or a created angel is alluded to ; but a close examination of the context will generally enable us to decide the question.

It is to the several appearances in our world of the Word, before His actual incarnation, that I shall direct your attention in the present chapter.

(1.) There can be no doubt that all the visible manifestations of the Invisible which are recorded in the Old Testament, were manifestations of the Son of God.

We go back to the time just succeeding the fall ; when our first parents, hearing the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day, hid themselves from the Divine presence amidst the covering of the trees. God calls them

forth from their hiding-place, not only to pass sentence of judgment, but to give merciful promise of a Redeemer to come. This "voice of the Lord God,"<sup>1</sup> who came down to Paradise to wrest the victory from Satan's hands, even in the hour of his triumph, and to revive hope in the hearts of the weeping pair, was none other than "the Word of God," who came to reveal the infinite mercy of the Eternal Father, who had purposed, by His Son, to remove the curse, abolish sin, and open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

(2.) Hagar, hardly dealt with by Sarah, flies from Abraham's tent into the wilderness. The angel of the Lord finds her sad, solitary, and homeless, by a fountain of water. He speaks comfortably to her; promises that she shall be the mother of an innumerable offspring; tells her that the Lord had seen her sorrow, and heard the voice of her affliction. "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly,"<sup>2</sup> said the Angel. Who can this be that claims the power of creation, and is able to look into the future, and forestall what shall come to pass? Hagar has no

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xvi. 10.

doubt on the subject. She recognises in the Angel one greater than a created being; and calls the name of the Lord that spake unto her, "Thou God seest me;" for she said, "Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?"

(3.) As Abraham sits in his tent door in the heat of the burning noon, he sees three men approaching, to whom he eagerly offers shelter from the sun, and the usual courtesies of hospitality. He was "not forgetful to entertain strangers," and his care and kindness are well rewarded. According to the words of the apostle, he "entertained angels unawares." Nor were all of them created angels. One was evidently something more. This Abraham discovers in the course of the interview. ~~For~~ One in particular stands out from the other two as chief in honour and greater in rank. It is He who addresses Abraham, and who, speaking in His own person as God, makes a promise concerning the birth of Isaac which God alone can fulfil; and it is He who in the detection of Sarah's secret unbelief proves Himself to be the Searcher of hearts. He is, moreover, expressly called Jehovah through-

out the chapter. "And Jehovah said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for Jehovah?"<sup>1</sup> It appears also from the narrative, that of the three who came to the plains of Mamre in the guise of men, only two go on to Sodom. These are the two angels who reach that city at even, and find Lot sitting in the gate. The third Stranger remains behind, and speaks to Abraham as the Lord Jehovah about the coming doom of the Cities of the Plain,—speaks to him "face to face," "as a man speaketh to his friend." Who is it, then, with whom Abraham pleads on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah? It is none other than the Second Person in the Trinity, the Lord Himself; He it is who, in His unmeasured condescension, deigns to pass into the patriarch's tent, and to partake of the patriarch's fare. It is the very Christ who in after days entered the home of the two disciples at Emmaus, and was "made known to them in the breaking of bread."

(4) Jacob on his return from Padan-aram is about

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xviii. 13, 14.

to meet for the first time for many years his brother Esau, whom he had foully deceived and deeply wronged. He hears that Esau is advancing at the head of four hundred men; and knowing that he has reason to dread his vengeance, he is filled with fear and dismay. He takes all needful precautions to guard his family from evil, and, preparing for the worst, sends them over the ford Jabbok, whilst he remains alone to pass the night in solitude and prayer. In the still, dark night, with silence all around, he is conscious of a Presence with which he grapples and engages in an actual struggle, as with a living man. The two wrestle for the mastery; and the long hours of the night pass in that conflict; nor is the victory declared to be on either side "till the breaking of the day." As the morning dawns, the mysterious Stranger prays to be released from the strong grasp of His antagonist: "Let Me go, for the day breaketh."<sup>1</sup> "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." But He had touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and it shrank, and was out of joint; and Jacob discovered in Him One more

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxii. 26.

than man. It was none other than the Angel of the Covenant. And when Jacob's faith is rewarded, and as "a prince having power with God and man" he prevails, he calls the name of the place Peniel; "for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Were there any doubt as to the nature of the Being with whom Jacob wrestled, it would be dispelled by the prophet Hosea, who thus describes that night-long struggle at the fords of Jabbok: "He had power over the Angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto Him; he found Him in Bethel, and there He spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial."

(5.) Moses, an exile from the Egyptian court, keeps the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. He sees something which may well fill him with awe. One of the thorn-trees of the desert is wrapped in flames, and yet the bush is not consumed. As he turns aside "to see this great sight,"<sup>1</sup> the "Angel of the Lord" appears unto him in a distinct form, as He did to the three children in the burning fiery furnace; and out of the bush there comes a voice, saying, "I am

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iii. 3.

the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hides his face, for he is "afraid to look upon God."

(6.) The Jordan has been crossed, and the children of Israel enter the promised land. The hosts are encamped before Jericho, about to lay siege to this renowned city. If this is taken, a great advance will be made toward the conquest of the land. How shall it be assailed with most hope and promise of success? Joshua goes forth alone to consider the best means of attack, and doubtless to pray for counsel and direction. He meditates with eyes bent on the ground. Suddenly he looks up, and there over against him is a man with a drawn sword in his hand. Neither daunted nor dismayed, he advances to him at once, and flings down the challenge, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"<sup>1</sup> Armed as thou art, art thou a friend or a foe? Is thy sword to be raised on our side, or on the side of our enemies? "Nay," is the answer: as no common ally or foe am I come; but "as Captain of the host of the Lord." Joshua knows at once who it

<sup>1</sup> Josh. v. 13.

is; and falling on his face to the earth in prostrate adoration, he says, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" For he sees in this armed Warrior One greater than either man or angel,—One who is deserving of all worship and honour. And since He who spoke to Moses out of the fires of the burning bush, and bade him put his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon he was standing was holy ground, now issues the same command to Joshua, we may not doubt that "the Captain of the Lord's host" was the same as the living God—the Angel of the Covenant; the Second Person in the blessed Trinity.

(7.) Manoah's wife is childless,—a peculiar sorrow to a Jewish woman, who may have lawfully cherished a hope that she might become the mother of the promised Messiah. To comfort and cheer her heart the angel of the Lord appears unto the woman, and gives her promise of a son, who was to be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and who should begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Full of the glad tidings, she runs to her husband, and eagerly pours the news into his ears: "A man

of God came unto me; and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible.”<sup>1</sup> Manoah prays that the man of God may be sent again to teach them “what they shall do unto the child that shall be born.” The prayer is heard. The angel appears to the woman as she sits alone in the field; and she hastens with the tidings to her husband, who follows her to the presence of the angel of the Lord. “Art thou the man,” he says, “that spakest unto the woman?” “And he said, I am.” Then Manoah prays that the promise given may be fulfilled; and asks, “How shall we order the child; and how shall we do unto him?” When he has received the angel’s reply he fain would detain him further, until they had made ready a kid for his use. He refuses, however, to eat bread; and if they will offer a burnt-offering, it must be offered to the Lord; for Manoah knew not yet that the angel was Divine. “What is thy name?” Manoah asks, “that when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honour?” “Why askest thou thus after my name,” is the reply, “seeing it

<sup>1</sup> Judg. xiii. 6.

is secret"—or "wonderful?" And now all doubt as to the mysterious Being is dispelled. For when Manoah places his sacrifice upon a rock, and from this natural altar the fire goes up toward heaven, the angel ascends in the lambent flame. Manoah and his wife are stricken to the ground in awe. And Manoah exclaims, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

Such are some of the pre-incarnate manifestations of the Saviour. As He appears to the saints of the Old Testament in angelic form, they are constrained by something supernatural either in His words or actions to exclaim: "Surely we have seen God." But "no man hath seen God at any time." "Thou canst not see My face and live, said Jehovah Himself.

How, then, are the statements to be reconciled? By regarding these appearances of the Angel of the Lord as manifestations of Him who is "the image of the Invisible God."

Thus it was Christ who spoke to Adam and his wife in Paradise; who comforted Hagar in the wilderness; who appeared to Abraham at Mamre;

who wrestled with Jacob at Jabbok; who talked to Moses out of the burning bush; who came to Joshua as Captain of the Lord's host; who in the flames of the altar went up to heaven in the presence of Manoah and his wife.

It is the great Being to whom my motto refers: "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in Him. But if thou shalt indeed obey His voice, and do all that I speak: then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For Mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off."

Who could this Angel be who was with the church in the wilderness; whose presence went ever with them; and who finally gave them rest? Surely it was the Angel of the Covenant — the great Redeemer Himself.

Behold, therefore, in these manifestations of the Saviour, before He came in the flesh, a great evidence of His love to mankind. They remind us that "He always rejoiced in the habitable part of His earth; and that His delights were ever with the sons of men." He was not satisfied to remain apart from the world, or to entrust its government to subordinate agents, whether man or angel; but left the heights of heaven to carry out in person the good purposes of His grace. He came to earth in angelic guise, and moved in and out amongst the children of men, to show the interest He took in their sorrows and troubles; and to prove that nothing that concerned them was beneath His attention and care. And so Hagar cannot weep in the wilderness without His coming down to guide her to the well; Abraham cannot sorrow over his childless estate without His appearing to give him promise of a son in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed; Jacob cannot dread his brother's vengeance without His descending to give him confidence in His strength and protecting care,—so with His other appearances, He would show His saints of old, and us, that He is

ever present with His people ; that His love never fails ; that His consolations are ever new ; that, though they see Him not, He is in very truth about their path, and about their bed, and spieth out all their ways.

The truth is that Christ was ever with His church, and that from the beginning He has acted as her guardian and her guide. When Moses suffered with the people of God, the reproach that he bore was "the reproach of Christ." When the Israelites in the wilderness murmured and rebelled, they "tempted Christ;" when they drank of the rock that followed them, "that Rock was Christ." And it ought to increase our confidence in Christ, and to give us unfailing trust in His mercy, to see how, in the earliest ages of the church, He comforted, and upheld, and encouraged His people with these visible manifestations of Himself as a gracious and covenant-keeping God. Truly, He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is the same Jesus, who, in the days of His flesh, had compassion on the hungry multitude ; pitied the living ; wept for the dead ; forgave the fallen woman, and

with dying hand opened the door of Paradise to the penitent thief. Trusting in Him we trust in One whose compassions fail not, whose love cannot change. How should such a thought exalt Him in our estimation, and endear Him to our hearts! How worthy He is of our obedience, and reverence, and love!

As in the universe He has the unchallenged pre-eminence, so may He have it in our thoughts and in our lives! Esteeming Him "the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely," may we leave all to follow Him. Living near to Christ, casting on Him our sins and sorrows, and walking in the light of His loving countenance, we shall find that He will make "all things work together for our good." "He will keep us in the way, and bring us into the place which He has prepared,"—a land both good and large: where "our sun shall go no more down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and our God our glory."

