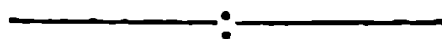


Christ our Sacrifice and Priest;

**Being Brief Notes on the
Epistle to the Hebrews.**



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**BY
F. G. BURKITT.**

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London :

JAMES CARTER, 13, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

Brief Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

IT must be evident to every thoughtful Christian that the Epistle to the Hebrews has a very special importance in the present day. The tide of Ritualism and Sacerdotalism is flowing deep and strong in Christendom; and, apparently, in an ever-increasing volume. These things are, in reality, a revival of the old principles and forms of the Jewish system mixed up with Christianity—a mixture which is destructive of the plain and simple truth as we have it in Scripture. The great aim of Satan is to cloud the glory of Christ by a practical denial of the value and efficacy of His sacrifice; and to rob souls of that solid and unchanging peace which flows from resting alone, in faith, on His completed work.

Now the Epistle before us meets all these attacks of the enemy, and that in a way truly divine. It begins in a manner quite peculiar, not being addressed to any church or individual; as, for example, the Epistle to the Ephesians, Colossians, Timothy or Titus. Nor is the name of the writer given (though doubtless it was the Apostle Paul), because Christ is presented as our Apostle, as well as High Priest: and it is *God* who is speaking to us.

Thus the very opening words declare that *God* is speaking. And this being so we are bound to pay all

attention to what He says. He had spoken of old to the fathers in many measures and in many ways through the prophets : though, indeed, the voice of the prophets had been silent for nearly 400 years, since Malachi. After this long silence God speaks again ; not now through a prophet or any intermediary, but *directly* in a Person, and that Person His own Son.

The inspired writer then gives a magnificent unfolding of the glory of Christ, the true Messiah, from the very Scriptures of the Old Testament so well known to those whom he addressed. Now this is of the very greatest moment for us as well as for them ; because everything, both for time and eternity ; for the sinner, for the Church, for Israel, hangs upon the truth of the Person of Christ. It is, too, an immense factor in the history of every individual Christian : for if we have a true and Spirit-taught apprehension of *Who* He is, our reverence to Him will be deepened and our appreciation of His ineffable love and grace, as well as of all the blessed results of His work, will be increased.

Here, then, the glory of His Person and the efficacy of His work both go together and depend the one on the other : and necessarily displace and supersede all that went before. His sacrifice takes the place of the Jewish sacrifices of old ; His priesthood, after the order of Melchisedec, takes the place of the priesthood after the order of Aaron ; the new covenant, founded on His blood, takes the place of the old covenant ; and, in fact, the whole ritual with its meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation, disappears : while Jesus Christ remains “ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” It is the full light of Christ Himself and of Christianity in contrast to the old shadows of Judaism. Seeing that this is so, is it not sad that many around us

are going back to the shadows, through unbelief, and leaving the light—in other words, turning to the law, to ordinances, and to rituals, instead of to Christ?

And, let us remark, that the use the Holy Spirit makes of the Old Testament in this first chapter is a fact of great importance for us. “Higher Criticism,” so-called, professes to be able to cut up the writings of Moses, etc., with the scissors, and casts discredit on the Bible: our Lord Himself and His inspired Apostles, on the other hand, fully accredited and endorsed the Old Testament, such as we have it, and owned it as the testimony of Jehovah Himself.

There are, then, three things brought before us here respecting the Son. (i) His Person, (ii) His work, (iii) His present position. As to His Person—He was ever the brightness of God’s glory and the exact expression of His substance or Being. The One who created all things, and not only so, but upholds all things when created by the word of His (the Son’s) power. These things could only be predicated of One who was absolutely and essentially God. As regards His work—He has made purification or cleansing of our sins. Now when we consider *Who* it was that did the work, it necessarily follows that the work done was worthy of Him who did it. But it needed, not simply an exercise of His will or His word as in creation; but something far deeper—it needed that He should *die*. Then, as to His present position—having finished His redemption work in such a way as to establish His own glory in doing it, He set Himself down, in His own right and title, at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

How evident, therefore, is the wisdom of God in commencing the Epistle with this unfolding of the glory of the Messiah, for everything depends upon it. And if the wavering faith of the Hebrew Christians needed to

be sustained by a divinely-given setting forth of His all-sufficiency and competency for the work He undertook as well as for every office He sustains, we may be fully persuaded that we need it likewise.

The position and glory of the Son is then contrasted with angels—they held a high place in the Jewish economy—but the Son is shown to be superior to angels. There are seven quotations in the first chapter; all of them, except one or two, taken from the Psalms. The first is from Psalm ii., where the Son is seen as born in time; owned as Son of God. Now, our Lord Jesus was ever the eternal Son, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father in eternity; and, when come into this world, He is owned as Son born in time. These two facts cannot be dissociated the one from the other. The next quotation is from 2 Sam. vii. 14 (or 1 Chron. xvii. 13). The passage has reference to Solomon, who was a type of Christ, and God takes the place of being to Him a Father and acknowledging Him as Son. We have then a quotation from Psalm xcvi. 7 (or Deut. xxxii. 43), where He is said to be the object of the worship of angels. Then, in Psalm civ. 4, God “makes” His angels spirits, but He never applies this word to the Son: it would be altogether unsuitable when we consider *Who* He is. And so the next quotation, from Psalm xlv., shows that the Son is Himself “God.” He was, as we know, eternally God, but this Psalm views Him in the days when He was here in this world; days in which it is said of Him: “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness”; and here He is owned by God as “God.” But there is still further proof of His deity and equality with Jehovah; and that of a very remarkable character indeed. For the title “God” had sometimes been applied to magistrates and judges as representing God’s authority; as our Lord Himself says in John x., quoting

Ps. lxxxii., “I have said, Ye are gods.” But there was one name which never was applied to any mere creature : it was reserved for the Supreme and only true God. That title was Jehovah, and it is here applied to Christ. The quotation is from Ps. cii., one of the most remarkable Psalms in the whole book. It is “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.” Here Christ takes the place of utter abasement and humiliation—His days consumed like smoke, His heart smitten and withered like grass ; it is the position of utter loneliness and reproach. He then contrasts His own position—as lifted up and cast down, His days like a shadow that declineth—with the permanence and enduring character of Jehovah, who “shall endure for ever.” The Psalm then brings in the future restoration and blessing of Zion ; and “when the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory.” But as for Him, His strength is weakened and His days shortened, He is cut off in the midst of His days. How, then, could He be there to bring about the future blessing of Zion? In order to understand the Psalm we must see that there is a change of speakers in the middle of verse 24. “I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.” These are the words of the humbled, rejected One on earth : then comes the divine answer of Jehovah above : “Thy years are throughout all generation. Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth : and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure : yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment ; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed : but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end.” We quote here from the Psalm itself, but the quotation is introduced in Hebrews with the words, “And, Thou, Lord,” etc. Whatever might be the place of deep

abasement and humiliation which He took on earth, He was none less than Jehovah Himself, the Creator of all, and the One who would remain when all created things had gone. Yea, when He Himself should fold them up as a vesture and they should be changed, then He, the Unchangeable, would abide the same.

To complete the Spirit's testimony here to the value and glory of the Person of the Messiah, it only needed the last quotation in our chapter. This is from Psalm cx. 1, "Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." This is His place of exaltation and glory, as the risen and glorified Man, according to the counsels of God. He is sitting there "until" His enemies are set as the footstool of His feet, and this Jehovah will surely accomplish in a future day. The time has not yet come for Him to sit on His own throne, but He has taken His seat on His Father's throne: *there* none are associated with Him. The day will come when He will sit down upon His own throne, when every enemy is put down, and His people shall sit with Him then.

Chapter ii. Here the inspired writer of the Epistle, using the word "we" and associating himself with those whom he addresses, warns them against the danger of slipping away from those things which they had heard. They were the things which began to be spoken by the Lord Himself, and were afterwards confirmed to others by those who heard Him. Everything depends on the dignity and glory of the One who speaks. There was a special danger that the Hebrew Christians should look back to the system they had left, but this is most important for us also, for there is always a tendency to slip back; and we can only go on steadily in the Christian course in so far as we are fed by the Word of

God, and Christ is livingly the object before the heart. This great salvation was not only first spoken by the Lord, confirmed to us by those who heard Him, but it was borne witness to by God by the various miracles and signs done in the power of the Holy Ghost. At the beginning of the Christian dispensation God was pleased to accredit the testimony of the Apostles by these outward marks and evidences of the truth of their mission.

Now it is a wonderful fact for us to consider that God always had *men* in view : He passed by angels and took up men. Our Lord Himself did not take angelic nature, but He became man—and He will retain this nature for ever. And so the Apostle says, the millennial earth will not be subjected to angels, but to men. For this he quotes Psalm viii., where we learn that everything is to be subjected to man in the person of the Son of man, *i.e.* Christ, who deigned to become man. This is a remarkable and interesting Psalm, part of which has been already fulfilled and part of which remains to be yet fulfilled. For Christ has already been made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour ; but all things have not yet been put under His feet. The Lord Himself refers to this at the end of John i. Nathanael had just owned Him as Son of God and King of Israel according to Psalm ii. ; but the Lord in His answer carries Him on to Psalm viii., where, as Son of man, He would be, on earth, the subject of the ministry of angels. But, while awaiting the millennial day of displayed glory, we see Jesus now by faith, crowned with glory and honour. “ By the grace of God ” He tasted death for every man. Let us note this expression. He did not taste death because of anything in Himself, for He was absolutely and wholly without sin in every way : it was in pure grace, for others. In chapter i. Christ is viewed more especially as God ; in

chapter ii. as man ; and there are various reasons here given why He became man. First, it “ became ” God—His glory required it—because there must be a sacrifice adequate to meet all His holy and just demands. And so it became Him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Needless to say, Christ was always perfect in Himself ; but having taken up the cause of sinners, He must go through everything that God’s glory demanded with regard to sin, cost what it might. And for Him the path lay right on through all the sufferings of the cross until He was the perfect Saviour in resurrection. And having accomplished all, He brings His people into a place of wonderful nearness and blessing. For He, the Sanctifier, and we, the sanctified, are all “ of one.” It is not here a question of progress in sanctification, of being more sanctified to-day than a year ago, for example : though it be quite true in its place that the Christian should be more set apart to God each day. But in Hebrews ii. the writer is speaking of Christians as those who are absolutely sanctified or set apart to God. The words “ of one ” are a little peculiar, and the meaning is more to be apprehended by faith than explained in words. While Christ is absolutely without sin, and so infinitely above us, yet He deigns to bring these sanctified ones into the same position and place of privilege in which He is before God—He brings them into the place of children and members of the same family. And so we have the quotation from Psalm xxii., “ I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee.” In the Psalm, these words follow immediately after His death is brought in. When the extreme point of suffering is reached—the “ horns of the unicorns ”—then He is “ heard ” in resurrection ; and at once He adds, “ I

will declare Thy name unto My brethren," etc. What wonderful grace ! The moment He is heard in resurrection He owns them as His brethren, declares the Father's name, and leads their praises in the midst of the assembly. Is it not deplorable that many in the present day who have looked to Christ as the Saviour have not even the certainty of their soul's salvation, and know little or nothing of the blessed relationship of children in the enjoyment of the Father's love? Yet in the very next quotation in our chapter, from Isaiah viii. 17 and 18, they are owned as children whom God has given Him.

And because these children were "partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." Now Scripture always carefully guards against supposing that Christ in any way participated in the evil nature which we possess as children of Adam—He partook of flesh and blood, was truly man ; but His was a holy nature, in no way tainted with sin. And because He was truly man, as well as God, and absolutely without sin Himself, His death could be efficacious as a sacrifice for sin. At the Fall, sin had come into the world, and with it death ; and Satan, who wielded the power of death, had got a kind of foothold on account of sin. Death is that which no man has ever been able to stand against ; it was an unstormed fortress of the enemy's power, and man was held in bondage through fear of it. But Christ, having become man, has gone down into death, met and overcome Satan in the last stronghold of his power, and so set free those who through fear of death were held captive all their lifetime. In Revelation i. we read that Christ has the keys of "Hades and of death." The "keys" signify authority : so that not one of His people can enter the unseen world and the domain of death without His permission ; and as soon as His resurrection "shout" is heard they will come forth clothed in bodies of glory like His own.

The Lord Jesus did not take angels by the hand so as to help them—no, He took up *men*. From eternity God always had men in view. Christ took up “the seed of Abraham”: and we know the true seed were the elect remnant, who had faith as Abraham had. He was “made like unto His brethren”: this primarily refers to the company of elect Jews just referred to; though in principle it applies to us also. And then the last reason here given why He became man was in order that He might “make propitiation for the sins of the people.” Sin had to be atoned for, for God was absolutely holy. In the type of old, on the great day of atonement, once in each year, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the goat upon which the Lord’s lot fell, before and on the throne, in the presence of God. In Christ, the antitype far surpasses the type; for He entered heaven with His own blood, which is of infinite value and eternal efficacy before God. Having, then, laid the basis for every blessing in His work of propitiation, He is able to help those who are in trial. Being a man and having passed through this world with all its trials and sorrows—having *suffered*; meeting all the reproach and scorn of men; He is able to succour those who are tempted. With Him there was nothing within to answer to the temptation presented from without: He never for a moment yielded: on the contrary the very presentation of the temptation caused suffering to His holy soul. But Jesus felt all as only a heart filled with infinite love and tender compassion could feel; and He is therefore perfectly qualified to sympathise with and to succour those who are tempted.

Chapter iii. Here the writer of the Epistle addresses them as “holy brethren.” This is not an appellation of some only; it is true of all true Christians however little

they may enter into it by faith. They were partakers of a "heavenly calling." It is not the same as the calling of the church which is so fully brought out in Ephesians, and where we have the body of Christ united to the Head in heaven. Here, in Hebrews, it is in contrast with an earthly blessing in the land of Canaan. But those to whom he writes are viewed as pilgrims going on to the rest of God, and needing to persevere to the end. We are, then, to consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. As the Apostle, He is the Sent One, who came out from heaven into this world in order to make God known. He came *from God* in order that He might Himself bring the knowledge of God to us. And as High Priest He has gone back to God, and ever carries on His people's cause in the presence of God. What a precious sustainment of faith as we pass through this world with all its trials and tests from day to day!

Moses was faithful as a *servant in* God's house: but Christ is a *Son over* His house. It was He who built the house; and He is God, as we have already seen so fully proved in chapter i. Now we (Christians) compose God's house or dwelling-place on earth. Here there is the "if"—"if we hold fast the confidence," etc. Many simple Christians are troubled by these "ifs," but we should remember that when Scripture speaks of our place in Christ above, there is no "if"; all is absolute security: when, on the other hand, we are viewed as pilgrims going on to the rest of God, and responsible to persevere to the end, then the "ifs" come in. It is quite true that God is faithful and will surely keep His own; but the warnings and exhortations of Scripture are needed so that we should hold fast that which we have got right through to the end. Besides we should bear in mind that this Epistle contemplates all those amongst the Hebrews who acknowledged the Christian "con-

fession," and possibly some of them may not have been genuine believers.

In introducing the quotation from Psalm xcv. 7-11, we find the words, "As the Holy Ghost saith." We should weigh well these words, because they show, just what is so much questioned now, namely, that these Old Testament Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Ghost. We find frequently that the sacred writers in the New Testament ascribe the writings in the Old to a divine source. This quotation proves that Israel did not enter into God's rest—and why?—because of unbelief. The wilderness journey gives a sad record of constant murmuring and tempting God. How often the same is true of the Lord's people now!—the result of want of faith in God on the one hand, and the hardening effect of sin, when allowed, on the other. But the "to-day" of God's patience is still running its course, and it will go on till the Lord comes. Let us, then, with an earnest and undivided heart press on after Him who has marked out the path before us!

Chapter iv. The subject of the early part of this chapter is rest—God's rest. The rest of Hebrews is not a present but a future rest. It might be supposed that the reference in verse 3, "We which have believed do enter into rest," was to a present rest; but this is not so, for it is there a question rather of the *character* or kind of persons who enter in, than any question of time—*i.e. believers* are those who enter. We may find three rests in Scripture:—(i) Rest of conscience about our sins; so the Lord Jesus says, "Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest." (ii) Rest of heart about our circumstances and trials. This the Saviour perfectly exemplified, for He took up the yoke of perfect obedience and submission to the Father's will; and He says to us,

“Take up My yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (iii) The future rest—God will rest in His love. This will be fulfilled in the millennial day, and fully in the eternal state.

The great point where failure came in with Israel was want of faith. This is why the word preached did not profit them; it was not mixed with faith in those who heard it: they did not enter in because of unbelief. And indeed faith in active exercise is what we all sadly need; implicit faith in God, faith that counts on Him, and perseveres as those who did so.

God rested in creation, when His works were finished. But soon sin came in and marred everything. Neither Joshua nor David gave the people rest, else David would not have spoken of another day. We have not entered into rest yet, for he who has done so has ceased from his works, as God did from His own. The argument of the passage is very simple, viz., when you are resting you have ceased from work. There remains, then, a sabbath-keeping for the people of God. The last four words, “the people of God,” are wide enough to take in those who will enjoy the millennial rest and the eternal rest also. He exhorts them to use diligence to enter in; to persevere in the path of faith right on to the end.

The chapter closes with three things which demand our earnest consideration. These are—the word of God, the priesthood of Christ, and the throne of grace. The word of God detects what would hinder us in running the race set before us. It has, indeed, many of the attributes of Christ Himself, the living Word. It penetrates beneath the surface and divides between soul and spirit—so keen is its edge. But all this searching and trying is just what we ought to desire, and what we do desire when there is truth in the inward parts. The word can detect not merely the outward acts, but the very

inmost thoughts and intents of the heart—those hidden springs that govern the man. Are any cast down or discouraged at the thought of this all-searching word? How blessedly the priesthood comes in to sustain and encourage ! For we have not an High Priest unable to sympathise with our infirmities, but One who was tried in all points as we are, sin apart. The title given to the Lord in this connection, “ Jesus, the Son of God,” is very precious. Being truly and perfectly man, He can sympathise as One who has a truly human heart, and being God He is able to adequately undertake our cause where He is, having passed through the heavens into the presence of God. And, lastly, the throne is a throne, not of judgment, but of grace. We are encouraged therefore to come boldly to God Himself—to His throne—so as to obtain the mercy and grace we so much need while down here.

Chapter v. In this chapter the subject of priesthood is continued. It is well to remark that the opening verses, which speak of the High Priest being compassed with infirmity, etc., do not refer to Christ, but to what is characteristic of High Priests taken from among men in general. Some have fallen into false doctrine by making Christ the subject here.

Now, under the Jewish economy, a man did not take the position of High Priest unless he was called of God, as was Aaron. The call of God was therefore necessary in order to hold the office. Two things are then brought out respecting the priesthood of Christ. First, as to His person, He is the Son ; and second, as to His office, He is called of God to be a priest. For the first, the inspired writer quotes Psalm ii., “ Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee ” ; and for the second, he quotes Psalm cx., where He is saluted of God as High Priest, “ Thou

art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” The priesthood of Christ is after the *analogy* of Aaron, but it is after the *order* of Melchisedec : and there are many remarkable points of contrast between the two orders, to which we hope to refer when considering chapter vii.

Verse 7 is one which we need to approach in a spirit of reverence and with hearts deeply sensible of what we owe to the divine yet lowly Saviour. What infinite grace, what divine love led Him—the eternal Son as He was—to become man in order that He might come near to us and feel for us, and above all in order that He might die for our sins ! He is here looked at “in the days of His flesh”—that is when down in this world as man. He then offered up “prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him out of death.” This was in Gethsemane ; where the whole weight of that which He was about to go through pressed upon His soul ; and where, in perfect submission, He took all from the Father’s hand. In all the truth of His humanity He felt what the cup was which He was about to drink—a cup of judgment against sin, the depths of which He alone could apprehend—and He felt it all perfectly. He was heard—heard in resurrection ; heard on account of His piety. This latter could not be said of us, for we are heard for Christ’s sake, but He was heard because of what He was in Himself. “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.” To Him the place of obedience was a new thing, for it was ever His to command : but now, having become man, He takes fully and loyally the place proper to man, and that is the place of obedience to the will of God. “And being made perfect,” etc. As already remarked, Christ was, as to His own Person, always perfect, but what is before us here

is perfection in reference to the office which He fills. Having done all, having completed His work on the cross, and being risen from the dead and glorified in heaven, He became the author or cause of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. This word "eternal" characterises the Epistle to the Hebrews, because this Epistle looks at the effects of Christ's work, in contrast with the temporal deliverance wrought for Israel : and inasmuch as He far surpassed all the types and shadows, so the efficacy of His sacrifice is of abiding and unchanging value.

From verse 11 to the end of chapter vi. is a parenthesis, in which the writer of the Epistle turns aside from his subject to deal with the condition of soul of those whom he addresses. This principle is important, because we never can really advance in divine things unless the heart and conscience are in exercise, and the practical life and conduct are in accordance with the word. We may acquire a certain amount of knowledge intellectually, but unless there is a right state or condition of soul, it will not stand when a testing time comes. These Hebrews were dull of hearing, they ought to have been teachers, but they needed to be taught again the first principles of the oracles of God. Evidently they had once been more advanced on the road, for they had *become* such as had need of milk. Now milk is that which is suitable for babes : strong meat for full-grown men, and they needed to be fed with milk.

Chapter vi. The early part of this chapter has been a difficulty to many young believers. Difficulties in Scripture, where there is faith and dependence on God, often lead to valuable exercise of soul not to be repented of. It greatly helps to clear up the matter to see that the inspired writer is not raising any question as to the

possession of eternal life, which, as we learn from other Scriptures, can never be lost. He does not even apply the teaching directly to the Hebrews themselves, concerning whom, he says, he is persuaded better things, etc., for he had seen the fruits of life in them.

We have already seen from the end of the previous chapter that the writer exhorts them not to remain in the condition of babes, but to go on to that of full grown men; and he pursues the same line of teaching in the portion before us. The things of which he speaks in verses 1 and 2 were all known before Christ came. Repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptisms (or, as we have the same word translated in chapter ix. 10, "washings"), laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment—all these, though true in themselves, did not go beyond what existed under Judaism.

Now one of the great objects before the Holy Spirit in the Epistle is to direct the hearts and faith of those to whom He speaks from the contemplation of an earthly Messiah to a heavenly Christ above. He had begun with this in chapter i., and He continues with it all through. And when the writer says that it is "impossible" to renew again to repentance those who were once enlightened, etc., he is not taking up the case of what we commonly call backsliders; if he were, there would be no possible hope for the recovery of such. But the case in point is that of persons who had left Judaism and embraced Christianity, professedly at least, and who were in danger of going back. Again, a man may enjoy all the outward privileges of Christianity, without being born again and possessing eternal life. When we read that it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who had tasted of the heavenly gift, were made partakers of the Holy

Ghost, had tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the millennial age, if *they* should fall away : we must not suppose that this passage goes the length of asserting that they had received these blessings in the soul by faith, or that they had eternal life. There were those who accompanied our Lord Himself, shared in the privileges of His disciples and witnessed His miracles, and yet who were wholly untouched in heart and unregenerate. There were some, even professed disciples, who believed not, and who went back and walked no more with Him. But if one such as those to whom the Epistle is addressed, and who had left Judaism with all its elementary shadows and observances, and embraced Christianity, were to give up Christianity and a heavenly Christ and return to that which had been left behind and superseded in Christ, what was there left for him? Absolutely nothing but judgment, and so much the more because he had despised and cast aside as worthless that which alone was of value in God's sight. It is an exceedingly solemn warning—and the warnings of Scripture are essential for our good or they would not be there. All this, however, does not contemplate the case of a true believer who may fall into sin. For such there is the precious provision in 1 John i. and ii., " If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," and " If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Our Epistle then exhorts them to diligence : not to be slothful, but followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. To the Hebrew Christians this exhortation was particularly appropriate, for they were accustomed to look for earthly blessings. But these two things are needed by us all—" faith " and " patience "—so that we may persevere, realizing that

our true portion is above, where Christ is. Abraham is then given as an illustration; and truly he had to wait long—to “patiently endure”—before obtaining the promise. The words here quoted from Genesis xxii. 17, are those which God spoke to him after he had shown such unwavering faith, when he was put to the greatest test of his life in the offering up of his “only son” Isaac. God swears by Himself because He could swear by no greater. How wonderfully He condescends to human language and human custom: in order that He might show to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, He intervened with an oath. The basis of the Christian’s hope is thus absolutely unchanging—the counsel and the oath of God Himself. But the great point is to direct the eye to heaven, to link the heart with heaven. *There* our forerunner, even Jesus, has entered as High Priest: and His priesthood is not of a transient or passing character as that of Aaron, but after a new and eternal order, viz., that of Melchisedec.

Chapter vii. The subject of priesthood is here continued, after the parenthesis which extended from verse 11 of chapter v. to the end of chapter vi. The closing words of the previous chapter mentioned the fact that the priesthood of Christ is after the order of Melchisedec; and in the seventh chapter the Spirit of God develops the surpassing excellency which characterises it. We are told very little about Melchisedec in the Old Testament; the only notices we have of him being in Genesis xiv. and Psalm cx. The great object of his introduction in Genesis was, doubtless, in order to serve as a type of Christ, for Christ was ever the One in the thoughts and mind of God from the beginning. Melchisedec was both a king and priest—priest of the Most High God. He is brought abruptly on the scene after Abraham had

returned victorious over the worldly powers : and the title here given to God—Most High—we find again in Daniel iv. where the humbled king owns God as the Most High, who rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever He will. So, in another Old Testament Scripture, we read, “ He (Christ) shall sit and rule upon His throne ; and He shall be a priest upon His throne.” This will be fulfilled during His millennial reign on earth.

But the great point in the chapter before us is to show that the priesthood of Christ is after the *order* of Melchisedec and not after the order of Aaron, as well as to bring out the many points of superiority of the former—a superiority which necessarily belongs to Him who is both God and man in one person. As a priest Melchisedec’s descent was not reckoned as that of the Aaronic priests must be (see Ezra ii. 62), nor had he end of life, whereas the sons of Aaron were only to be numbered from thirty years old to fifty. The superiority of Melchisedec is further shown, inasmuch as even the patriarch Abraham paid tithes and received a blessing from him, and unquestionably the less is blessed of the better. With divinely given skill the inspired writer proves that the whole order of things is changed : for perfection was not by the Levitical priesthood ; if it had been there would have been no need for another priest to arise, after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron. And with the change of the priesthood, there comes necessarily a change of the law. But even Melchisedec, exalted as he was, was but a shadow : Christ is the substance, and Judaism, with its types and shadows, passes away, while Christ and Christianity remain.

Further, our Lord did not spring from the priestly tribe of Levi, but from Judah : His priesthood was not, therefore, hereditary, as was Aaron’s. Nor was it brought to an end by death, for it was not after the law

of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.

We should notice that the word “*did*,” in italic print in verse 19, should be left out : the passage will then read thus : “‘There is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof (for the law made nothing perfect) and the bringing in of a better hope.’” This little word “better” is found in Hebrews about thirteen times, and marks the contrast between those blessings which we have under Christianity, and the state of things which previously existed under the law. The priests of old were made so without the swearing of an oath : but Jesus with an oath, and that the oath of Him who will not repent—Jehovah Himself. Then, again, the Aaronic priests did not continue, for death overshadowed everything in this world, and they too were mortal men who died. But Christ continues ever, and His priesthood is intransmissible ; that is, it does not pass from father to son. Having drawn out so fully the contrast as between the priesthood of Christ and that of Aaron, and having shown in so many ways the dignity and surpassing excellence of the former, our Epistle proceeds to unfold the blessed results for us. He is able to save—not merely in a temporary way—but right on to the end, all those who approach to God by Him. Christ ever lives, never dies, therefore His intercession is permanent and abiding. We read in chapter ii.—where it was a question of meeting the claims of a holy God and glorifying Him about sin—that “it became” God that He should die ; nothing else could adequately meet the case. Here in chapter vii., such a High Priest “became us” ; One who could exercise a continuous and unchanging priesthood, according to all the dignity and value of His Person, before God. He is holy, harmless, undefiled,

separated from sinners and made higher than the heavens. Wondrous privilege to have such a High Priest making intercession for us ! The High Priest of old offered up sacrifices “ daily,” and both for his own and the people’s sins ; but Christ offered up Himself, once for all, never to be repeated. The High Priests under the law were merely men, who had infirmity ; but the Christian’s High Priest is the Son, who is “ consecrated for evermore.”

Chapter viii. In the first chapter we saw that the Lord Jesus had set Himself down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, as the One who had made purification of sins. In this chapter (viii.) He has set Himself down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, as our High Priest. His priesthood is essentially heavenly, for the law and the Jewish system had an order of priests on earth, whose functions were connected with an earthly tabernacle and service ; but the priesthood of Christ is exercised, not on earth, but in heaven. The “ examples ” and “ shadows ” of heavenly things have passed away, because the reality and the substance have come. The inspired writer uses many characteristic words in order to give emphasis to the contrast, and in order to set forth the superiority and excellence of what is brought in under Christianity. Christ, he says, has a “ more excellent ” ministry, and He is the Mediator of a “ better ” covenant, established on “ better ” promises.

Many sincere people fall into the mistake of supposing that the Christian is placed under a covenant of some kind ; thus they put themselves under law, instead of seeing that they are under grace. Now the first covenant was made with the house of Israel and of Judah, and so is the new covenant also—it is not made with Christians

at all. It will be fulfilled in the millennium, when God will put His laws into their mind, write them in their hearts, and when all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest. But the important point for us to notice here is that the bringing in of a *new* covenant necessarily displaces and renders the first covenant old, and it is ready to vanish away. Meantime we, Christians, have all the privileges and blessings of the new covenant (while yet we are not under law but under grace), for it is founded on the death and blood-shedding of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter ix. This chapter commences by explaining briefly the structure and service of the tabernacle of old, in order to show the contrast between the state of things which existed under the law and that which exists under Christianity. Connected with Judaism there was a system of divine service and a sanctuary on earth. In the tabernacle were two parts—the holy place and the most holy—the veil which separated these was still unrent, and God was not revealed as He is now. Into the first the priests could come at all times, but into the second the High Priest only, and that once a year, with blood and a cloud of incense. The *people* did not enter in at all. In passing we should notice the expression, “The Holy Ghost this signifying,” because it shows the divine origin of the oracles of old : it was the Holy Ghost who, through Moses, gave or indited the law and the Old Testament Scriptures, which give us the account of these things in detail.

But the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest, nor could the sacrifices then offered give a purged conscience—they were “carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.” The very force of the contrast to all this, which is to be found in the

sacrifice of Christ, only serves to bring out more fully the amazing value of His offering, in its eternal efficacy before God ; and the permanence and immutability of the results which flow from it for us. “ But Christ,” says the Apostle, “ being come an High Priest of good things to come ”—this latter expression, “ good things to come,” is wide enough to cover what will be true for Israel in a future day, and what is true for us now. The priest under the Jewish economy ministered unceasingly in a tabernacle made with hands, and presented the blood of bulls and goats, which could not take away sins : but Christ entered in once for all, presenting His own blood, the efficacy and value of which is *eternal*—a word which characterises this Epistle. In verse 14 we have one of those verses of Scripture in which the whole Trinity is mentioned. Christ Himself was the Offerer and the Offering, for He offered Himself. As man He offered Himself, and that spotless, *to God*. And all was done in the energy and according to the will of the *Eternal Spirit*. Necessarily such a sacrifice was of immense value, meeting every requirement of God’s holy nature, glorifying Him fully, and laying an immutable basis of blessing both for the believer now, for Israel in a future day, and for all eternity. Through this sacrifice, then, the Christian has a *purged conscience*. What, let us ask, does this signify? It means a conscience so fully cleared of every charge of sin in virtue of the blood of Christ, that not one question remains unsettled between the soul and God. Does the reader know what it is to possess this?

Now Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant, but in order that this covenant might have force, death must come in. To prove that this is so the writer uses, as an illustration, the common case of a will. A will is of no force while the testator is alive : death must take place before it

can be given effect to. This was true even of the old covenant, for Moses sprinkled with blood both the tables of the law and the people. And not only so, but he sprinkled the "things" as well—both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. Death and bloodshedding were absolutely necessary (not only for the persons, but for the heavenly places defiled by sin) for purification; and this is a lesson sadly needed in Christendom, where so much is made to depend on forms and ordinances, instead of on Christ. Yet Scripture is as plain and clear as words can be, that "without shedding of blood is no remission"; so that all religion which leaves aside atonement by blood, and goes on the ground of works or aught else, is totally opposed to the very foundation truth of Christianity. We should specially note the words "*shedding* of blood" here. This never can take place again, nor can Christ ever "suffer" again—the work was done once and for ever.

And not only has Christ offered a "better" sacrifice, able to purify the conscience, but He has entered heaven itself and now appears in the presence of God for us. His sacrifice, too, being of infinite and unchanging value, necessarily excludes all thought of repetition. What marked and distinguished the sacrifices of old was *repetition*; this is expressed in the word applied to them—"often." What characterises the sacrifice of Christ is non-repetition, and this is expressed in the word "once." Now it was not immediately after Adam sinned that Christ appeared, although there was, even then, the promise that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. But God allowed the trial of man to go on for centuries, in various ways—without law, under law, with the prophets, etc. At the end of this long period of trial, when man had failed in every way—for this is the meaning of the expression "in the end of the

world ”—then Christ appeared. We should carefully note that there are two things said here—“ to put away sin,” and to “ bear the sins of many.” “ Sin ” is the root, the evil principle : “ sins ” are the fruits or acts produced by the bad root. Remark, it does not say Christ has put away sin, but that He appeared to do so. The full, final putting away of sin will not be until the whole universe is cleared from every trace of it in the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. We have in these closing verses a reference to the various parts in the great day of atonement (Lev. xvi.) There was first the slaying of the victim and the sprinkling of the blood in the holiest of all, upon the mercy-seat. This typified the blood of Christ, presented before God, by which all His holy and just requirements as to sin were fully met. Then the blood was sprinkled upon the tabernacle itself—figurative of the application of the efficacy of Christ’s blood to the heavens themselves, which now “ are not clean in His sight.” After this the sins of the people were confessed over the scape-goat, by which they were borne away into a land not inhabited. This latter was a type of Christ bearing the sins (it does not say of *all*, but) of many : namely, of those who believe.

Now the appointed lot of man as a child of Adam and a sinner, is death and judgment ; but as to those who have faith in Him, Christ has borne their sins and set them free, and to “ them that look for Him ” He will appear the second time, apart from sin, unto salvation. This passage is so worded as to take in those amongst the godly Jews who, in a future day, will be looking for the Messiah, as well as Christians who are looking for Him now. It is here assumed that every Christian is looking for Christ, and there is no ground in the passage for the erroneous idea that only those who are looking

for Him will be “ caught up ” when the Lord comes—a theory which is altogether foreign to Scripture. His appearing the second time will be “ without sin.” Of course, as to His own Person, Christ was always without sin; but He became the sin-bearer for others on the cross; and the point before us here is that He settled the whole question so finally and disposed of it so fully *then*, that when He comes again He will have absolutely nothing more to do with sin in any way whatever. His appearing the second time will be “ unto salvation.” The word “ salvation ” in this verse is to be understood in its fullest sense. We have already the salvation of the soul, but the body has not yet participated in salvation. A day is soon coming, however, in which the efficacy of the sacrifice and the results of Christ’s redemption work will be so fully effectuated, that our bodies also will participate in it, and we shall be changed and transformed even bodily into His image in glory.

Chapter x. The law and the Jewish system gave a general outline of the coming good things, but not the exact image of the things. Continuity of sacrifice, which could not perfect the conscience, distinguished it. The argument is quite simple, viz., if these sacrifices could give a perfect conscience, they would have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. It is not here a question of *sin*, or of the evil nature which the believer has, and which he will have right on to the end of his journey, but of the fact that his conscience is purged from *sins* by the blood of Christ. So effectually purged indeed that it would be impossible that these sins could be brought up against him, Christ having atoned for all perfectly by His sacrifice on the cross. If, then, these sacrifices of old could not take away sins, of what use

were they? They served as types and shadows of what was coming, but the reality being come, the one great sacrifice having been offered, the types and the shadows necessarily disappear. On one particular day in each year, the great day of atonement, there was a yearly repetition of certain offerings, and the work of this day stood out prominently from all the rest, as embodying the great principle of approach to God on the ground of sacrifice. Like all other offerings of old, the calling to mind of sins and constant repetition distinguished that day. But, solemn as the day was, and divinely ordered for the time being, yet it was "not possible" that those sacrifices could take away sins. What then could meet the case in a permanent way, as well as one worthy of God Himself?

In order to answer this question we are carried back by the inspired writer to Psalm xl., where we are admitted to hear the counsels of the divine Persons of the Godhead in those by-gone ages before the world was, and before sin entered at all. What wonderful and infinite grace! The four main kinds of offering are then mentioned—"sacrifice and offering, burnt-offering and sin-offering"—and these God "would not" and took "no pleasure" in. Then we find that *God's will* was that we should be blessed and saved; but how was that will to be made good to us? how reach and bless us in our lost and ruined condition? The answer is that the blessed Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, undertook to do the will of God, in the body prepared for Him. Christ, by taking the place of the willing victim, and offering a sacrifice adequate to meet every just and holy demand of God, has opened up the way whereby the will of God can reach and bless us in the ruined and sinful condition in which we lay. And so, if it was God's will that we should be saved, it was none

the less Christ's will to take the place of the victim. Now when we consider the glory and dignity of the Person who undertook to do the work, the adequacy and sufficiency of the work itself follows as a necessary consequence.

The result for the believer is in keeping with a work so glorious and so complete. By the will of God, and through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, he is set apart to God. It is not, in this epistle, as already remarked, any question of progress in sanctification, of being more sanctified to-day than, say, a year ago (a principle which is true in its place), but of the fact that the Christian is looked on as absolutely set apart to God once for all in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ.

We have then the most complete contrast between the Jewish priests, who "stood daily" offering; and Christ, who "sat down" for ever. In order to make this passage plain it should be remarked that there are two phrases which are translated "for ever" in this Epistle. One of these signifies unlimited duration; the other uninterrupted continuity. This latter being used in verse 12 we may translate it, "but this man . . . sat down continuously (or uninterruptedly) at the right hand of God." The comma should come after the word "sins"—having offered one sacrifice for sins, etc., He sat down continuously. The work of the High Priest of old was never done; the work of Christ was so completely finished that nothing more can be added to it: when He rises from His throne it will not be to add anything to His "one sacrifice," but to judge His enemies. This is a blessed and peace-giving fact for our souls! Then follows the application of this to the believer; for "by one offering"—not repeated offerings—He has perfected continuously (same phrase again) them that are sanctified. All believers are included in this class—the sancti-

fied ones—and they are perfected for ever. This does not mean that they are perfect, which, of course, we know they are not, for we read elsewhere, “in many things we offend all.” It is perfection as to our standing in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. And as Christ is sitting down continuously or uninterruptedly at the right hand of God, so the Christian is continuously perfected.

Then, as someone has remarked, we have not only the will of God and the work of Christ, but the witness of the Holy Ghost. In keeping with the fact that all our blessings flow from the *will* of God Himself, and that the *work* was accomplished by the Son of God, we have now the *witness* to us by no less a Person than the Holy Ghost: so that the whole Trinity are active on our behalf. It is not here the Spirit witnessing *in* us—bearing witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God—but the Spirit witnessing *to* us—“Their sins and iniquities I will never remember any more.” With such a testimony for faith to rest upon, what could we want more?

We have, then, boldness or liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and that at all times. This is the common privilege of all true Christians; every believer is therefore a priest, one as much as another. Indeed the setting apart of a priestly class or caste is a denial of Christianity in its most essential elements. What a contrast to the state that existed under the law! Alas that many Christians, through unbelief or defective teaching, never get very much beyond the state of a godly Jew! They know but little of this blessed liberty which is theirs in the presence of God. Our High Priest has entered in *once* into the holiest: not, as the High Priest of old, to go in and come out again, but He is always in the presence of God for us. God Himself has rent the veil. If we turn to the account of this as given

in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, we shall find that the rending of the veil is recorded in the very next verse after the death of Christ. God, if we may say it reverently, lost no time in rending the veil the moment the blood of atonement which met His holy and just demands had been shed. God can now righteously come out in blessing, and the believer in Jesus can enter in, within the rent veil. There are then two things—the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and the body washed with pure water. This is an allusion to the Jewish priests, who were anointed with blood and washed with water. The application of the blood clears the conscience before God from sin, and the water is symbolical of that purification by the application of the word of God, which we need to cleanse from daily defilements in going through this world.

We have here three important exhortations :—

- (i) Let us draw near.
- (ii) Let us hold fast.
- (iii) Let us consider one another.

The first depends on the fact that God has removed every barrier that once stood in the way, so that we might enjoy the most perfect and unclouded access into His presence. The second would encourage us to hold fast the confession of the hope without wavering, knowing that God is faithful who has promised. The third would encourage us to think of others—so that we might stir up one another to love and to good works. These practical exhortations—following upon the unfolding of the doctrine of the epistle, where the value of the sacrifice and the place the believer has in virtue of it, are so fully set forth—are of great importance for us all : may we be enabled truly to take them to heart !

Another exhortation here given is, not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as some were doing.

No doubt, with the Hebrews, the danger was lest they should do so in order to avoid the difficulties connected with the confession of Christ. But surely we need this exhortation also, and so much the more as we see the "day" approaching; not because the present are days of outward persecution in these countries at least, but because of our tendency to self-ease and slothfulness.

We have then a warning to those who had the privileges connected with Christianity—who had received the knowledge of the truth—all the more solemn because of the divine efficacy and perfection of the sacrifice of Christ, which our Epistle had already unfolded so blessedly. It is right to remark here that the question of the possession of eternal life (a life which never can be lost—see John x.) is not raised in these verses any more than in chapter vi. Persons may receive "the knowledge of the truth," in an intellectual way, and be "sanctified by the blood" outwardly—or, as in the case of Israel, nationally—without being born again or having received divine life at all. The "sinning wilfully" here is really apostasy from Christ. It consists of two things: (i) Turning away from the sacrifice of Christ, counting the blood of the covenant common; and (ii) doing despite to the Spirit of grace. It was in the power of the eternal Spirit that Christ offered Himself to God, and it was the Spirit who bore witness to the complete remission of sins through the blood. After having known these truths, to deliberately turn away from them and prefer sin; to give up the profession of Christianity altogether, left no further sacrifice, and nothing but judgment remained. But we may remark here, as in chapter vi., that the apostle encourages them by referring to the signs of divine life and reality which he had seen in them. They had endured much affliction, had compassion on prisoners for Christ's sake, and took joyfully the spoil-

ing of their goods—no easy thing to do, as we know. Endurance, confidence in God, and persevering faith are needed in the Christian course. 'Then there is the power of hope to sustain the soul, for it is but a very* little while and He who shall come will come and will not tarry. What an encouragement this is to persevere in the path of faith, knowing that very soon the coming One will come and will not tarry. 'Then all will be rest and peace in His presence for ever.

Chapter xi. The previous chapter closed with the quotation from Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith," and in chapter xi. we have many bright examples of those who acted in faith amidst the trials and difficulties of their path. These examples are designed to encourage those to whom the Epistle is addressed, as well as believers in all ages.

Faith makes substance of things hoped for but not yet possessed, and it gives us the firm conviction of things not seen. It has for its basis the revealed will of God in the Scriptures, and thus it brings divine certainty into the soul, where otherwise all would be darkness and speculation. The order with which the different actions of faith are grouped together in this chapter is an evidence of divine design; for all was inspired by the Holy Ghost. It commences with creation, as to which we are not left in vague uncertainty, but we know that all was called into existence by the divine fiat of God. Then sin came into the world, and Abel, by faith, offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. He came with the blood of a victim, on the ground of the death of

* With regard to the repetition of the word "*hoson*" in the original, Winer, in his "*Grammar of New Testament Greek*," remarks that it is equivalent to saying, "*A very, very little*," properly, "*Little how very, how very*."

another, and not with the fruits of a cursed earth. This is the faith that justifies, for God reckoned him righteous. Then Enoch was translated to heaven without passing through death. He walked with God during 300 years, in the power of faith, and he had the testimony that he pleased God. Enoch prophesied of the judgment that should come on the ungodly, but he never saw it, for God translated him to heaven. This answers to believers of the present dispensation, who will be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air," when He comes, and so pass into His presence without death before the judgments are poured out on the world. Whatever people may say or do that is good in itself, without faith it is "impossible" to please God. Those who come to Him must believe that *God is*. This is much more than that He exists, which everyone acknowledges except Atheists; but He is the living God to be counted on, and the rewarder of those who seek Him out. May He enable us to be more in earnest and more diligent in counting on Him !

Noah gives us the example of one who, when warned of God as to the impending judgment, in faith prepared an ark for the saving, not only of himself, but his house. The trial of faith was long, for Noah was many years building the ark, and there was no apparent sign of the Flood. But, whatever may have been the mockery or opposition of the world, Noah, moved by godly fear, went on to the end. If in Enoch we have a type of saints of the present dispensation, in Noah we get an evident type of the godly remnant of Israel, who are saved through the judgment which will fall upon the world and are brought in to enjoy the millennial blessing afterwards.

Then we have Abraham, the father of the faithful—above all Old Testament saints the great example of

faith. After the Flood a new thing came in, and that was idolatry. It existed even in the family of Terah, Abraham's father (Joshua xxiv. 2). God then called out Abraham to go into a strange land. He had nothing but God and His word to go upon, but this was enough, and he went out not knowing whither he was going. But there was much more than this. He "sojourned" in the land, he was "a stranger and a sojourner"; he was marked by two things—his tent, which marked him out as a pilgrim, and his altar, which showed he was a worshipper. But he did not go back to Chaldea; in faith he came out and in faith he stayed out. Alas, how many have started brightly enough on the Christian course, but, failing to go on in the power of faith, have become involved in worldly things and lost their distinctive place as strangers and pilgrims here! Not so Abraham, for by faith he went on; he reached out even beyond the dispensation in which he lived, for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Next we have Sara, and here the Spirit of God in grace passes by all the failures and unbelief which we see was there from reading the history in Genesis, and mentions her as one of the instances of faith.

And, as to these, the promised blessing did not come in their day—they *died* in faith. They "saw" the promises afar off, they "embraced" them, and they "confessed" that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. What wonderful achievements of faith! They might have looked back and returned, but no! they went on in the power of faith, looking on to a heavenly country, even though they had not the bright and full revelation concerning heavenly things which we have, now that Christ has gone on high and the Holy Spirit has come down.

We now come to the severest test of faith recorded in the Old Testament. Abraham, "when he was tried," offered up Isaac. When God said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest," etc., Abraham did not reply, "O God, how then are all the promises to be fulfilled?" No, he went off at once. As well as his feelings as a father, the whole question of the promised seed was involved; but "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith giving glory to God," when the heir was promised; and then when God told him to offer up this very Isaac, he obeyed at once without a question. Marvellous achievement of faith! He believed in a God of resurrection, and thus Isaac became an eminent type of the true Seed, whom God spared not, but delivered up for us all.

The instances of faith in the case of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, were at the close of their life. Here faith looked on to the future blessing and counted on God as the One who was faithful to fulfil the promises He had made, whatever the difficulties might be.

In Moses we have the energy of faith. The faith of his parents is first mentioned—they hid him three months because they saw that he was a beautiful child; and they doubtless also believed that God would yet deliver His people. If apparent worldly advantages ever surrounded anyone it was so in the case of Moses. Brought up by Pharaoh's daughter as her own son, he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. Why not use his influence at court to forward the interests of his people? This is what expediency would have dictated, but faith took him out of these very circumstances which, to mere reason, appeared so advantageous. He "refused" the place of worldly honour, and he "chose" the place of suffering along with the people of God. And that, too, at the very time when the

people were in their low estate, both as regards their bondage in Egypt and their slowness to accept deliverance from their position. He esteemed the reproach of Christ—this is how the Spirit of God here speaks of it, though Christ had not yet come—greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked off, in faith, to the reward. Faith enabled Moses to leave the court of Pharaoh, to identify himself with the people of God, no matter how low and despised their estate might be, and to prefer the place of reproach to all the riches and treasures of Egypt. And so the principle is the same in the case of the Christian. He is not to be guided by circumstances or appearances, even though they may be most plausible. Faith in God, His word, and a single eye for the glory of Christ, can alone give intelligence in His mind and in what is suited to Him.

Then there was the question of the salvation of Israel from the just judgment of God, and their redemption from the bondage of Egypt. The Israelites and the Egyptians were both sinners, but the former, acting in faith on God's command, put up the blood of the slain lamb outside their houses, and so were saved from the destroyer. By faith, too, they passed through the Red Sea—those very waters were a wall of protection to them; but the Egyptians, "assaying" to follow the people of God, but without faith, were drowned. Many, like them, ostensibly follow the same path as the true Christian, without that faith which forms the link between the soul and God; all such only perish in the attempt.

Our chapter then passes over the whole of the wilderness journey and takes us into the land. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." The first city which barred the way of the people was Jericho. It is remark-

able that this city, walled as it was so strongly, should have been taken in a manner which to mere reason appeared quite useless. Yet God would show His people at the very outset of their conflict with the enemy that the true source of strength was to be found in faith and simple obedience to His command.

From what unexpected material some of those who are given us by the Holy Spirit as examples of faith are drawn ! Rahab was a sinful woman, yet she could say, “ *I know* ” that the Lord has given you the land. This is ever the language of faith ; she did not reason on probabilities, but she *knew* that Israel was the people of God, and that He had given them the land ; and so she identified herself with them and obtained deliverance for herself and her household.

The closing part of the chapter gives us various forms of trial through which the people of God were enabled to pass in the power and energy of faith. God knows all the sorrows of His people, and He notes the very manner in which each had to suffer. They were His worthies, though the world was not worthy of them. And they “ received not the promise ”—it was put off till that brighter and better day when they, and we also, shall rest in the rest of God, where no trial or sorrow could ever come.

Chapter xii. Since, therefore, we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses to the power of faith, as those given us in chapter xi., the exhortation comes in very fittingly to lay aside every weight and sin which so easily entangles us in the race, and to run with endurance the race set before us. It may be asked, What is a “ weight ” ? It is anything that hinders in the race. No athlete, for example, would think of running a race with a heavy cloak on ; he would at once be conscious that

it was a hindrance, and throw it aside. May God give us grace, then, to cast aside whatever hinders us in running on with endurance in the path of faith, whether that hindrance be a weight or a sin! We have then the example of Jesus Himself. He is the beginner and finisher of faith. It would have been much better had the translators left out the word “our,” printed in italics in our Bibles, as it gives the impression that the subject in hand is the perfecting of *our* faith. The previous chapter gave us many bright examples of those who lived, in part at least, some more, some less, the life of faith; but Jesus, to whom our eye is now turned, ran the whole course from beginning to end without a single faltering step. Whatever lay in the way, He went right through all to the very end. He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. This is the One whom we have to “consider well.” Are we disposed to be discouraged, to grow weary or faint? Let us then consider Him, for His path was one of reproach, of shame, of suffering even unto death itself. They had not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin, as Christ Himself did, and even some of those in chapter xi., who died a martyr’s death.

Moreover another way in which suffering might come would be from the chastening hand of God. He chastens His children for their profit, in order that we may be partakers of His holiness, and so that this chastening may yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. However trying for the time, it is all in love; in order to produce in us what is suitable to Himself.

Mount Sinai and Mount Sion are here put in contrast. The former was the place of the giving of the law, accompanied by signs which showed the majesty of the Lawgiver. The latter is associated with grace—that

grace which triumphs over all man's failure. It was after everything had failed and come to ruin in Israel that God set David, His king, upon Mount Sion—the city which He chose, and where the true David will yet reign over the house of Israel for ever. It is helpful to remark that the word “and” here divides the different classes named. “And unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”: from Jerusalem below the eye is directed to Jerusalem above, where all is permanent and abiding blessing. “And to an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly”: here the heavenly scene unfolds itself. It gives us the surroundings of God's throne above, as it will be in the future day, but known now to faith. We read in the Psalms, “Thousands of angels,” and in Rev. v., “Many angels . . . the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” They are the natural inhabitants of heaven, who do God's will. “And to the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven”: it does not say they are born there, but their names are enrolled there. Christ is called the Firstborn. He has this title according to the dignity of His Person. His people are here called the “firstborn ones,” in virtue of the infinite grace which has brought them into such a place, and inscribed their names above. “And to God the Judge of all”: it is not here God as Father; but He is seen, as the centre of this glorious scene, as the Supreme over all. “And to the spirits of just men made perfect”: these are Old Testament saints, who have finished their course here, and are seen above, awaiting the day of resurrection glory. “And to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant”: it is not said that we are come to the new covenant, but to Jesus, the Mediator of it. As to the covenant itself, it will surely be made good to Israel in a future day. “And to the

blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel '' : the blood of Abel cried for vengeance on his guilty brother, but the blood of Christ speaks of peace and salvation through grace. All these things were well calculated to encourage the Hebrew Christians (who would be naturally exposed to the danger of looking back to the law and the Jewish system) to persevere in the path of faith and to appreciate more fully the place they were brought into by grace.

The chapter closes with a solemn warning to those addressed not to refuse Him who speaks from heaven. What a remarkable '' promise '' is here given ! '' Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. '' At the giving of the law He spoke on the mount ; *now*, the same person speaks from heaven. All created things shall be shaken and removed : but we who are associated with Him who created all, receive a kingdom which cannot be moved, and which will remain when all else passes away.

There are two things here mentioned which are much needed with us all, especially in these days—reverence and godly fear. The soul that is really near God is sure to be marked by these characteristics. Our God is a consuming fire. This is the God the Christian has to do with, and it is well to remember it. This need not cause dread in the heart in the smallest degree, but it is a wholesome thing to bear continually in mind that sin is abhorrent to God. He is a consuming fire against all that is unsuited to His presence.

Chapter xiii. The closing chapter of the Epistle contains important exhortations. We are exhorted to show brotherly love, to use hospitality, to consider those in bonds, to purity of life, to be without covetousness and to be content with our present circumstances. We are

to remember our leaders (verse 7)—this refers to those who had died—and to consider the end of their life of faithfulness. In verse 17 the exhortation is, “Obey your leaders,” etc., and here we have the living ones, who watch over the soul’s welfare. Then, “Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever”: everything connected with Judaism has passed away—its priesthood, its sacrifices, its rituals, etc., but He remains, ever the unchangeable One.’ And the writer immediately adds, “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” This is a most important exhortation in the present day, when the air seems filled with strange voices. Nothing leaves the people of God more open to be carried about by every wind of doctrine than not being satisfied with Christ. If He is really everything to the soul, this keeps the feet steady in following Him.

The Christian, then, has an altar; it is not the rituals of Judaism revived, but it is Christ, through whom we approach to God. In the case of those sin-offerings whose blood was brought within the veil, the body was burned without the camp. Jesus, therefore, entered in with His own blood; and He suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem. This gives us the Christian’s place: on the one hand liberty to enter in within the veil, into heaven itself (chapter x.); and, on the other, identification with Him without the camp. His was a place of shame, of reproach, of ignominy. How far are we prepared to follow Him in it? What gives force to the exhortation is the fact that it is going forth *unto Him*. He bore the reproaches of men, and more especially of those who had a religious standing to maintain; those who boasted in a ceremonial religion, but had no heart for God or His truth. However little we may enter into it, yet it is true in principle to-day, as it was then, that the Christian’s

true place is identification with Christ in the place of reproach from the world—"bearing His reproach." And, as someone has said, "If the professing church takes the position of the camp here below, the place of the *believer* is always outside." But for this we need to go on in faith, knowing that here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

The Epistle has already shown us that a repeated or continuous sacrifice is a denial of the "one sacrifice" of Christ. There is, however, a sacrifice which is continuous, and that is the sacrifice of "praise to God continually," and "doing good and communicating"—praise arising by Christ to God; and giving to the needs of men, are sacrifices well pleasing to God.

Lastly, he asks for their prayers, because he has a *good conscience*—a most important thing for every true servant of God. Then he commends them to the "God of peace," and closes with a prayer that they may be perfected and well pleasing in His sight. "The God of peace" has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. This title is particularly beautiful. Peace of conscience about our sins stands, for us, on the solid ground of the blood, the value of which is evidenced by the resurrection of our great Shepherd; and we have peace of heart as regards our circumstances and difficulties, knowing that God is above all that may happen down here. May He enable us to know and enjoy this peace better, practically, from day to day!
