

CHAPTER III

THE ADMONITORY SECTIONS OF THE EPISTLE. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL LIFE

IN Hebrews we find a series of sections, some short, some long, in which the writer pauses in the course of his didactic argument to address warnings or exhortations to the readers; the letter as a whole is indeed an exhortation or appeal with which they are asked to 'bear' (xiii. 22). These passages are of very great interest as showing how the author envisaged the religious situation of the particular society to which he was writing. They open windows on that situation, and to this extent they enable us to estimate more accurately the relevance and practical purpose of the theological doctrine of the Epistle. In particular, they provide a means by the aid of which it may be determined whether Hebrews was addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience, as tradition has ordinarily asserted, or to some other group, and what were the dangers to which the group was exposed.

The first of the passages in question occurs at the beginning of chapter ii. It comes in immediate sequence to the impressive prologue in which the writer, after declaring the finality of the Christian revelation, presents Jesus Christ, the Son, the Wisdom, and the Image of God, as enthroned at the right hand of the heavenly Majesty with a rank as much exceeding that of the angels as the name which He has inherited is superior to theirs. He then proceeds to admonition.

THE WORD OF JESUS AND THE WORD OF
THE ANGELS (ii. 1-5)

Therefore we must give very special attention to the truths declared in our hearing, if we are not to drift from the course. If the word spoken by angels was valid, and all transgression and disobedience incurred its proper punishment, how shall we escape if we treat with unconcern a salvation so great as ours, one which, taking its beginning from the word spoken by the Lord, was certified to us by those who heard it, God bearing them out by the witness of signs and portents of various kinds, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit allotted in accordance with His will? For it is not to the angels that God has subjected the World to Come of which we speak.

The danger against which the readers are here asked very specially to guard is that of 'drifting' in the sense of slipping away from, or losing hold upon, the Christian salvation. A nautical metaphor is employed, but the meaning is further defined as neglecting or 'showing no concern about' the revelation of God in Christ. The passage does not explicitly name any competing object of attraction to which the community is falling away. No more is asserted than that there has been a slackening of interest in, a letting slip of the reality of the Christian message. The writer's next words, however, suggest that if what is denominated as *the word spoken by angels* was not itself the deflecting cause accounting for the aberration of these Christians, at any rate the reminder was needed that the Christian revelation was of more solemn import than that word. The writer, speaking of the Christian revelation, presents it under three aspects, which constitute its

supreme claim to consideration: (1) There is its source in the word not of angels, but of Christ; (2) there is its attestation by men who had heard that word, and whose witness had been attended by every kind of numinous manifestation of power; (3) there is its eschatological character, or reference to the World to Come. 'It is not to the angels', says the writer very pointedly, 'that God has subjected the World to Come of which we speak.' Evidently the peril of the community was that of so lax a hold on the Christian realities as seriously to endanger its share in eternal salvation.

The antithesis in which *the word spoken through the Lord* is here set over against the word spoken through angels leaves the character of the issue in little doubt. The prominence given to Christ over the angels in the opening chapters of Hebrews has been explained sometimes by the hypothesis that the community addressed was tempted to angel-worship, a contingency not beyond the bounds of possibility in certain Jewish and even Christian circles,¹ or alternatively was in danger of falling away to syncretistic pagan religion, which, like the whole life of the pagan peoples, was believed in Judaism to stand under the government of the angels. Thus we find in Deuteronomy iv. 15 and 19-20 certain words of warning spoken to Israel which in the Septuagint version run: 'Take heed lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the universe (Heb. host) of heaven, you are led away and worship and serve them, things which the Lord your God has assigned to the (other) nations under heaven. But you the Lord has taken, and brought forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a special people of His own.' Again, in chapter

¹ Revelation of St. John xix. 10, xxii. 8.

xxxii. 8, we read in the same version the words: 'When the Most High apportioned the nations, when He scattered the sons of Adam, He fixed the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.'¹ Taking these two passages together, we see in Israel an association of the angels or 'host of heaven' with star-worship and other pagan practices, and indeed Rabbinical Judaism recognised angels of Rome, Egypt, Babylon, Media, Greece, and other countries, as well as of the elements, water, fire, wind, iron, and the like.² But neither to the one nor to the other of these errors, neither to angel-worship, though it raised its head at Colossae,³ nor to astral religion and pagan practices in general, is there any allusion in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We seem, therefore, to be thrown upon another explanation which fortunately admits of easy recognition and certainly agrees better with the general character of the passage.

In Judaism the angels were the mediators and guardians of the *Law* of God. We have St. Paul's statement that 'the Law was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator',⁴ and, what is even more to the point here, we have Stephen's reminder to the unbelieving Jews that they had 'received the Law in charges from angels, and had not kept it'.⁵ Assertions to the same effect occur in Josephus⁶ and in the Rabbinical literature.⁷ While it is not said expressly in our Hebrews passage that it was any fascination from the side of the Mosaic Law that was drawing the community away from the revelation of God in Jesus, the theory that

¹ See Strack-Billerbeck, Index under the word 'Engel'.

² *Ibid.* ³ Colossians ii. 18, 23. ⁴ Galatians iii. 19.

⁵ Acts vii. 53. ⁶ E.g. *Antiquities*, XV. 5. 3.

⁷ Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, III. pp. 554-556, a rich storehouse of material.

some influence from this quarter was accountable for the deflection and relaxation of purpose with which the community is charged is not incompatible with the evidence of the section as a whole, and may be assumed provisionally as a reasonable explanation.

The final statement that it is not to the angels—who rule in this present world—that God has subordinated 'the World to Come' is significant as an indication of the writer's eschatology, his conviction that in Jesus eternity has made itself known in time, introducing a supreme crisis in religious history. Those, he means, who lose their grip on this gospel of the Ultimate Reality forfeit their share in the final salvation of God and in all that that salvation means. Judaism, indeed, as Dr. Moffatt points out, assigned to the angels in heaven a function of ministering and interceding to the Lord for the righteous, and making expiation for their sins of ignorance. The classical passage for this, in effect priestly, ministry or 'liturgy' of the archangels is Testament of Levi iii. 5-6, but Dr. R. H. Charles in his commentary on the Testaments cites also T. Dan. vi. 2: 'the angel that intercedeth for you . . . is a mediator between God and man'; T. Levi. v. 6: 'I am the angel who intercede for the nation of Israel'; 1 Enoch ix. 3: 'to you, the holy ones of heaven, the souls of men make their suit, saying, Bring our cause before the Most High', and other passages. A heavenly function is thus ascribed to the angels with reference to the supernal world. But for the writer to the Hebrews all such functions of these 'ministering spirits' have faded in the light of Christ as the stars pale when the sun has arisen. Christ alone is Lord of the World to Come.

THE HEAVENLY CALLING OF CHRISTIANS AND
THE ESCHATOLOGICAL NOW (iii. 1-11)

The passage we have examined is followed at ii. 6 by a return of the writer to his expository theme. He turns from the exaltation of Christ above the angels to His supremacy with reference to man. Jesus is the Son of Man—though the writer to the Hebrews does not, any more than St. Paul, use that express title of Christ—who through the complete identification of Himself with humanity in life and in death was able to overthrow the devil's sovereignty in death, and has thus qualified Himself to become our High-Priest with God. The admonitory section which follows blends didactic matter with exhortation in a rather complicated fashion, but we may separate out certain strands of the argument as relevant to our practical purpose.

Therefore, holy brethren, you who share the heavenly calling, take note of Jesus, whom in our confession we acknowledge to be our Apostle and High-Priest. Jesus was faithful to the God who appointed Him, just as Moses was 'in all God's house'. Jesus has been accounted worthy of a higher glory than Moses (iii. 1-3).

Here (i) we find the writer concerned to stress the supernal character of the Christian course of life. The persons addressed are 'companions of the heavenly calling'. Heavenly calling is an expression which, like such other terms beloved of the writer as 'drawing near to God' or 'running the race set before us', reveals the characteristic orientation of his mind to the eschatological quality of the Christian life. It brings out the inevitable tension which is at the heart of that life. According to this writer, we have here no continuing

'city', nor even any present 'rest' in the life of the soul. We are drawn by Jesus into a course which has its only satisfaction and End in God. We shall be brought back to this conception repeatedly.

(ii) In the same passage we find the writer emphasising again the transcendence of Jesus, but this time by comparison not with the angels but with Moses. It is possible that the citation of the Scriptural word that Moses was 'faithful in all God's house'¹ reflects the fact that the community at Rome in its situation of Christian indecision was emphasising the dependability of the religion of the Law. The writer replies that Jesus also is dependable, but Jesus as the Son of God has received from God a higher standing and authority than Moses.

Is it also possible—the point may be merely suggested in passing—that in declaring Moses to be faithful, the community at Rome was thinking that the religion of the Law had at least its written books, a solid buttress to which the new faith could not lay claim? Actually there is no evidence in the Epistle of this being asserted. The writer's appeal to the readers is that they consider Jesus in Himself as the final revealer of God, whose personal relation to God as 'Son' confers on Him an authority transcending all other claims (i. 1-2). But in Jewish-Christian circles of the first generation or two the force of arguments based on the religion of the Book may have created disquietude over against the religion of the Spirit.

(iii) The writer presents Jesus as 'the Apostle and High-Priest of our confession' (iii. 1). I have translated these words in the form 'Jesus, whom we confess to

¹ Numbers xii. 7.

be our Apostle, etc.', giving *homologia* its normal and natural sense. There is no warrant or need for understanding the term here as an equivalent for 'religion'. Christianity as known to the writer is the confession of Jesus Christ as our High-Priest, and this for him is as momentous as the confession 'Jesus is Lord' is for St. Paul.¹ It is true that Stephen did not, in so many words, designate Jesus as our High-Priest, but the conception is consonant enough with his reaction away from the older cultus. Nor is it likely that the primitive Christian community, with the Messianic 110th Psalm before it, was not familiar from the beginning with the thought of Jesus as 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'.² Certainly the fact that in Hebrews Jesus is presented to us as our High-Priest (ii. 17, iii. 1, iv. 14-16), *before* there has been any theological explanation or elaboration of the idea by the writer (chapters vii.-x.), suggests that this office of Jesus belongs to the *a priori* element, the charter-substance of the received Christian faith. And if the confession also proclaims Jesus to be our 'Apostle', it should be remembered that in Judaism the high-priest on the Day of Atonement was recognised as the *Shaliach* (the apostle, commissioner) not of men but of God.³

(iv) The writer insists on the critical importance of the present moment in religious history.

We are His house if we keep our confidence and exultant hope firm to the End. Therefore the Holy Spirit (specifies Today as the time. He) says, 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as (your fathers did) at the Provocation, on the day of the Tempta-

¹ Romans x. 8-9.

² Psalm cx. 4.

³ Strack-Billerbeck, III. p. 4 cites *Qid.* 23b as authority. See the whole discussion of the term *Shaliach* on pp. 2-4.

tion in the desert. . . . So I swore in My anger, They shall never enter into My Rest ' (iii. 6-8, 11).

The author of Hebrews unquestionably regards his readers as placed in a situation of crisis comparable to that of Israel in the wilderness. The Christian life is, in fact, a new Exodus—not to an earthly place of rest, such as the old Israel was promised but failed to attain through unbelief, but to a heavenly Rest, an eternal kingdom of God. In such a journey everything depends on the maintenance, through 'confidence and exultant hope', of the original tension set up by the entrance into time of the call of God in Jesus. Jesus has announced the eternal order. Christians live in the ultimate period, the last 'Now' of time. The writer quotes Psalm xcv. 7-11 as the testimony of the Holy Spirit that the people of the Exodus missed the goal through not listening to God's voice. Hence their obstinacy, wandering, and final loss of their inheritance. They did not keep up by faith 'the march in God begun'. Now, says the writer, *God has declared again an ultimate chance, a final Now, a critical last Today of salvation.* Will the readers grasp again the supreme significance of the Eternal Moment inaugurated by Jesus and of the journey commenced in Him? While the appeal to the Exodus may not prove that Jewish-Christians are addressed, seeing that St. Paul in 1 Corinthians x. can similarly ground an appeal to a Gentile Church, there is nothing which makes against that assumption.

It can be argued that the author's reiterated emphasis on the 'forty years' of Israel's probation in the desert makes transparent the date of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews was written at a time when the fortieth anniversary of the dawning of salvation in Jesus (ii. 3) was

already at hand or at least in prospect, therefore in the sixties of the first Christian century. This date agrees so well with certain other features in the evidence for Hebrews that the argument should not be dismissed, as it is by Dr. Moffatt.¹

It is in the light of the critical issues of the existing situation that we must understand the appeals to the readers which now follow.

VARIOUS WARNINGS RELATING TO THE CRISIS (iii. 12-iv. 13)

Look to it, brethren, lest there be in any of you a wicked unbelieving heart tempting you to depart from the living God (iii. 12).

We see that unbelief was the cause of their (Israel's) not being able to enter in. While, then, the promise of entrance into His Rest remains, let us be afraid of any one of you being thought to have dropped behind (iii. 19-iv. 1).

We have become partners with Christ, if we keep our initial confidence firm to the end, while the word 'To-day' holds good (iii. 14 f.).

We have had the good news (of salvation) preached to us, just as they had, but the message heard brought no benefit to them, because they were not united in faith with the (true, or believing) hearers (iv. 2).

Let us make it our aim, therefore, to enter into that Rest (of God) that no man may fall through the same sort of unbelief. For God's Word is alive and active and cuts deeper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the separation of soul and spirit, joints and

¹ *Commentary*, p. 45.

marrow, and keenly discriminates between the thoughts and purposes of the mind (iv. 11-12).

On these passages only a few comments are necessary.

(a) The danger of the situation in the community appears everywhere as that of apostatising from the living God, and this through unbelief or infatuation wrought by sin. Nothing in the writer's language suggests a resurgence of pagan immorality, such as a Gentile-Christian community might be particularly exposed to, as the ground of this warning against sin. To the author, as to St. Paul,¹ everything which is not of *faith*, which in this case means every taking of the eyes off the Christian goal of life, every relaxation of the eschatological tension of the soul, would be sin. On the other hand, nothing in iii. 12, iii. 14-15, iii. 19-iv. 1 necessarily indicates a Jewish-Christian group as the recipients of the warning.

(b) In the passage about being 'partakers with Christ' (iii. 12-15) the author's conception of the norm of Christian life comes clearly to the front. There is in Hebrews nothing of the faith-mysticism of St. Paul which comes to expression in the doctrine of Christ 'in us' or us 'in Christ'. The eyes are outwardly and objectively directed towards Christ as the Pioneer, the Forerunner, and the Perfecter of our faith (xii. 1-2), and we are 'partakers with Christ' in the sense of being loyal to, and following Him into the life of the World to Come. Doubtless in this rapt engagement to keep Christ ever before our eyes there is involved so close and intimate a determination of our personal existence by Him that in a real, though not in the Pauline mystical sense, we may be said to be 'in Christ'. The

¹ Romans xiv. 23.

substance of the relationship implied may be the same in both cases, but the plastic form of the language used is different.

(c) Christianity means (iv. 11-12) a life in which we expose our whole existence at every point to the cutting edge, the trenchant judgment, the drastic operation of God's Word to us in Christ, a Word which as 'living' is incompatible with stagnation and death, and as 'active' gets things done. The life so laid open at every point to God's judgment upon us is the truly *eschatological* life, and has the nature of eternity already in it.

(d) Just as St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Old Testament people had the sacraments given to them at the Red Sea and in the desert, so the writer to the Hebrews reminds his group that the same people had the gospel of salvation preached to them, but the message brought no benefit to them, because

'They were not united in faith with those who heard it.'

If this is the right reading,¹ it admits of the inference being drawn that the Christian group at Rome whom the writer addresses was separating itself off in the matter of 'faith' from the true believing body of the Church. In terms of our hypothesis, a section of Jewish-Christian brethren was drawing apart from the mass of the Jewish and other Christians constituting the Church at Rome. There is, indeed, another reading, according to which the message did not benefit the old Israel 'because it (i.e. the word) was not united to faith on the part of those who heard it'. But the

¹ It is the reading of the mass of Uncial (BACD etc.) and other Greek MSS. The other reading is supported by \aleph and a few Minuscules.

first reading, as the more difficult of the two, is to be preferred, and the acceptance of it in the sense above indicated advances very notably the understanding of our problem.

Summing up the results so far reached, we see that the community addressed in Hebrews, apparently under the influence of the Jewish Law or 'word spoken through the angels', was drifting from the truth of Christianity, and in danger of apostatising from the living God. It was revealing an unpardonable indifference to the momentous significance of Christian decision at a supreme moment in history. It was relaxing its hold on Christ in whom the Eternal World had announced itself. It was not exposing itself to the judgment of God's living Word, and one result was that it was withdrawing, or tending to withdraw itself, from the Church's larger fellowship of faith.

NECESSITY OF ADVANCING FROM FIRST PRINCIPLES TO THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY (v. 11-vi. 18)

In chapter v. 1-10 the writer turns to the divine character and institution of the office of Christ as our High-Priest, quoting Psalm cx. 4, and describing in moving terms how Jesus in 'the days of His flesh' was 'perfected' by His prayers and intercessions to God, His passionate crying and tears, and His godly obedience learned through suffering. So He was qualified to become our High-Priest with God and 'the author of an eternal salvation'. Speaking with reference to the mystery of this Priesthood, the writer confesses the difficulty of finding words by which he can explain himself to his readers.

About this I have much to say, and it is difficult to explicate the meaning since you have become dull of hearing. At a time when you ought by experience to be teaching others, you are in need of some one instructing you over again in the very rudiments of divine revelation (v. 11-12).

The writer's difficulty is that his hearers are backward hearers who have remained virtually at the A B C stage of religious understanding. The sally that they need elementary instruction at a time when they ought to be teaching others excludes the possibility of the community in question being regarded as an intellectual *elite* of some kind to whom the writer desires to communicate some higher Christian *gnosis*. The latter view is, indeed, defended by Dr. E. F. Scott,¹ who thinks that the very abstruseness which the writer feels to be inseparable from his argument at this point is itself essential to the hortatory purpose in the writer's mind. An effort of thought is required in order to lead the community out of its complacent contentment with the mere elementary principles of faith.

It is difficult, however, not to think that this interpretation exaggerates the intellectual side of the author's appeal. All that is necessarily implied is that it is time that these backward Christians at Rome came to a mature understanding of the kind of *life* to which from the beginning they were as Christians committed. Something is retarding the advance from first principles which might have been expected of them.

Let us therefore leave behind us the elementary principles of Christian teaching, and bear forwards to a

¹ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 30 f., 42-45, 194 f. Cf. Dr. A. Nairne, *The Epistle of Priesthood*, pp. 22 f.

realisation of results. We cannot always be laying foundations in terms of repentance from dead works, faith in God, instruction about baptisms and imposition of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (vi. 1-2).

What the writer proposes is not necessarily to advance into new realms of truth or to develop a *gnosis* of the Christian religion. His purpose may be merely to lead his hearers from superficial apprehensions of the life to which they are as Christians committed, by asking for a follow-up in appropriate action. Are they going forward from the first principles of their confession, or are they going back upon these principles? In the latter case the foundations would need to be laid all over again, and this the writer deprecates. Nothing, however, really justifies us in saying that he is indifferent or superior to Christian 'beginnings'. That has been asserted, and a contrast has been drawn in this respect between him and St. Paul, who does not treat the fundamental verities of the faith as a stage that may be left behind.¹ As against this criticism, it is only necessary to compare certain words of the latter in his Epistle to the Philippians, which speak of whole reaches of Christian apprehension and attainment not yet achieved by him towards which nevertheless he presses. The admission that these further stages of cognition and achievement exist does not, however, imply that the Christian knowledge in question needs to be developed *speculatively* in a Gnostic direction, and no more need we read that idea into the mind of the writer to the Hebrews. St. Paul's meaning is unambiguous, and both in form and substance it affords a very

¹ So E. F. Scott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 76.

excellent parallel to our author's plea. 'My one purpose is, forgetting the things behind me, and reaching out to those before me, to press to the goal for the prize of God's high calling in Christ Jesus. Let all of us who are mature share this purpose with me.'¹ At this point St. Paul is as much an eschatologist as is our author.

It is a tenable view, therefore, that the persons addressed in Hebrews were immature Christians needing more of the gospel, rather than immature theologians whom the author wished to initiate into a higher *gnosis*.

As for the foundations which the teacher cannot always be re-laying—repentance from dead works, faith in God, instruction about baptisms, etc.—there is no ground for inferring that the persons appealed to were of Gentile extraction, since Jews would not have needed indoctrination on such points. Even Jewish Christians might be backward Christians. Moreover, Jesus had to speak to Jews about repentance from dead works,² and about faith in God.³ He had to speak to His 'Hebrew' Church about the difference of John's baptism from His own.⁴ A Hellenist-Jewish convert, Apollos, had also to be initiated into the distinction between the two rites,⁵ and the experience of the Ephesian group in Acts xix. suggests the significance for—presumably Jewish—converts of the 'imposition of hands' in sequence to baptism. As for the 'resurrection of the dead' and 'eternal judgment', Jewish converts, even more than others, needed to learn the new meaning which these ideas had acquired through the Christian

¹ Philippians iii. 12 f.

² Cf. Mark xi. 23 f.; Luke xviii. 8.

³ Acts i. 5.

⁴ Cf. Matthew v. 20.

⁵ Acts xviii. 24-26.

revelation. The passage, therefore, is perfectly compatible with the Jewish extraction of the group addressed, and may even be held to favour it.

For it is an impossible thing for the once enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have become participants in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the Age to Come, and fall away—it is an impossible thing to bring them to a new repentance, since they crucify the Son of God for themselves, and expose Him to contempt (vi. 4-6).

This is one of the most famous and, historically, one of the most debated passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the point of its denial of a 'second repentance' Tertullian defended Hebrews as against the laxer doctrine of the Pastor of Hermas, which allowed defaulters a second chance. Tertullian's judgment is definite enough. Accepting Hebrews as a work of Barnabas,¹ he writes:

'Et utique receptor apud ecclesias epistola Barnabae illo apocrypho Pastore moechorum.'

Montanists and Novatians also appealed to the Epistle to the Hebrews at this point.

The interest of the passage for us is the light which it throws on the historical situation of the readers. The writer is not giving expression to general truths, but assumes, for the sake of argument, that the falling away in question is an accomplished fact. The Christians addressed, after receiving through Christ the blessings and gifts of the New Age—note the terms 'heavenly gift', 'Holy Spirit', 'powers of the Age to Come'—fall away. They take thereby an irreversible step. In

¹ See above, pp. 10 f.

the heavenly gift, in the Holy Spirit, and in the powers of the Age to Come, Ultimate Reality has projected itself into time through Christ. It has laid hold on these Christians not simply as enlightenment or truth, but as life and power. If as Christians they fall away from it, what then? It has been imagined that the reference is to a relapse to Judaism, actual or prospective, on the part of the group. Through disappointment with Christianity because of persecution and the delay of the Lord's coming, this group is thinking to recover religious integrity by reverting to the older faith. On this view the second repentance which is declared 'an impossible thing' is re-integration into Judaism.¹ But this is not in itself a natural interpretation of the passage. As the writer does not say to what the group is resiling, nothing more can be inferred than that it is falling away from Christ. On the other hand, the further statement that such persons are 'crucifying' Christ for themselves is at least patient of the interpretation that they are *virtually* putting themselves in the position of the Jews.

But, though I speak like this, beloved, I am persuaded in your case of better things, things that connect with salvation. God is not unjust: He does not forget your work and the love you have shown for His sake in the service which you have rendered and are rendering now to the saints. But I long that each one of you should show an equal zeal to attain full assurance in your hope right to the end, so that, instead of being inert, you should live up to the example of those who inherit the promises by their faith and patience (vi. 9-12).

It would appear, then, that the catastrophe predicted in the last section was hypothetical rather than real.

¹ Above, p. 14, and Nairne, *The Epistle of Priesthood*, pp. 13 ff.

The community's work and love, shown for God's sake in still continued service to the Church as a whole, is a sign that they have not dropped out of the purpose of God. But the writer would fain see in all of its members a greater tensivity of forward-looking and expectant faith. He sees them listless, uncertain, not keyed to the standard of those who by faith and patience attain the promised inheritance of God.

THE CONSECRATED WAY.—THE CALL TO FAITH
AND HOLINESS (vi. 19-20; x. 19-31)

The Christian inheritance is in eternity, not in any present possession or experience of the soul. Christians are 'refugees of God' (vi. 18), persons who have sought asylum, ultimate deliverance as offered in Him. And between us and the fruition of the eschatological hope a link exists—Jesus, our Forerunner, our High-Priest.

This hope we hold to as to an anchor of the soul, unslipping and unyielding, and reaching into the world within the Veil. There Jesus has entered in advance of us, having become High-Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (vi. 19-20).

In terms of this fine metaphor Jesus is the Forerunner (*prodromos*), who has passed on into the heavenly world, carrying with Him the anchor to which our souls are made firm. We may connect this conception of the Forerunner with what was said earlier of the specific character of Stephen's futurist outlook: we do not wait passively for the Lord to come to us from heaven, but we go out, so to speak, towards Him and the heavenly world.¹

¹ See above, pp. 32 f.

In chapters vii.-ix., which here intervene, the writer develops his didactic theme—the Priesthood and the Sacrifice of Christ—making use for this purpose of the Alexandrian conception of the Two Worlds with its contraposition of heavenly reality and earthly shadow. In chapter x. he comes to grips again with the historical situation of his readers.

My brothers, now that we have confidence to enter God's holy place through the blood of Jesus, by the new, living way which He has instituted for us through the Veil (which means His flesh), and have a great High-Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold, without any deviation, to the hope which we confess to be ours, for He who has promised can be trusted: and let us study how to stimulate one another to love and good works (x. 19-24).

We find here again the familiar notes to which our ears have become accustomed in the practical teaching of the Epistle—'confidence', 'full assurance of faith', 'undeviating hope'. These are qualities in which the writer knows the community to be weakening through the taking of their eyes off the transcendent heavenly end of their vocation. But something more is added here, as we should expect, now that the writer in chapters vii.-ix. has brought to full expression his thought of 'the one true, pure, immortal sacrifice' which our great High-Priest has made for us.

In this passage we have perhaps the supreme expression of the writer's thought of the Christian life as worshipful approach through Christ to God. In St. Paul's letters the note of worship is constantly present,

as for example where he says that Abraham believed, 'giving glory to God'¹; St. Paul, no more than the writer to the Hebrews, can think of a faith which has not adoration at the heart of it. But in Hebrews the whole pattern of Christian life is conceived in terms of worship. That life is a continuous, and indeed eternal approach to the holy Presence of God. But it is to the heavenly, not to the earthly Holy of Holies that we now draw near, and we enter not by way of the ancient sacrifices for the removal of our guilt, but 'through the blood of Jesus'. We go by the new, living way which Christ has instituted, and we go as the cleansed, as those who have 'our hearts purified by sprinkling from an evil conscience' as well as 'our bodies washed in pure water'. We have an unmistakable reference here to Christian baptism as the rite which from the first days of the Church signified destination for, and prophetic entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God, the sphere of salvation. So our life is conceived as an ever-deepening entrance into the mystery of fellowship with God. It is an ever-increasing response to the Manifestation of God, and if the writer describes the way as a 'living' way, it is because it is not by the lifeless works or dead victims of the old religion that we are prepared and purified for access to God, but by the living Christ who has entered the heavenly Sanctuary in advance of us, pleading His atonement.

The writer speaks of this way as 'through the Veil'. The metaphor is derived from the curtain in the Tabernacle which hung between the outer sanctuary and the Holy of Holies (ix. 2-9). Here by a mystical-allegorical touch the writer identifies the Veil with the 'flesh' of Christ. The Gospels speak of the veil of the

¹ Romans iv. 20.

Temple, the barrier which hung between God and man, as rent at the death of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews, as Dr. Moffatt trenchantly puts it, 'allegorises the veil as the flesh of Christ; this had to be rent before the blood could be shed, which enabled Him to enter and open God's presence for the people'.¹

But that this conception of Christian life as Approach, Worship, the supra-ritual Purification and Sanctification of our spirits, signifies no indifference to the practical task of holy living is made clear by the exhortation not only to faith, but to sincerity, love, and good works. Our author's concentration on worship as the essential form of the religious life is not, therefore, justly represented when it is said that there is not in Hebrews, as in St. Paul, a passing from ritual ideas to an inward 'reasonable service'. In Hebrews worship is the norm of life, but it is a worship which is sublimated, though not subjectivised. In its out-going activity and its continuous upward direction of the soul towards God and the heavenly world the whole regeneration of our spiritual and moral nature is subsumed and included.

Let us not discontinue meeting together, as the habit of some is. Rather let us exhort each other, the more so that you see the Day drawing near (x. 25).

This injunction follows appropriately on the reminder about love and good works in the previous section. But what is this desertion of the common 'meeting' of which the community is here accused, allusively rather than directly, in the reference to 'some' whose custom this is? (1) We know that Christians with Gnostic leanings were in the habit sometimes of seceding from the

¹ *Commentary*, p. 143.

Church.¹ And the same might hold true of conservative Jewish Christians not in full sympathy with the freedom from legal and ceremonial observances practised by the larger Church. On this interpretation—see what has been said above on iv. 2—the gathering which is being forsaken is that of the Church as a whole.² The defaulters are a minority group. But there is (2) another possible interpretation which I would suggest as deserving of consideration. The gathering which is being forsaken is the private gathering which the minority itself has been accustomed to observe, but which is now falling into desuetude through the weakening of the impulse of Christian faith within the group.

On this hypothesis it would be open to us to suppose that a group of Jewish Christians derived from, or possibly still continuing to exist within, a Jewish synagogue at Rome was under stress of one kind or another—opposition, persecution, disappointment—giving up its Christian meetings and virtually dissolving back into the general life of the Jewish community. On the same hypothesis the word *episynagoge*, which is here used, might be given the sense of 'epi-synagogue', or Christian appendage to the Jewish synagogue. Elsewhere, however, the word simply means gathering, and while the dissolution of a Jewish-Christian group into the general life of Judaism would not, under certain circumstances, be incredible, nothing in the writer's language justifies us in carrying our hypothesis to this extreme. It is not even definitely indicated in the passage that the group was Jewish-Christian, though the probability that it was is a strong one.

For if we sin deliberately, after we have attained to

¹ Cf. 1 John ii. 18 f.

² Above, pp. 58 f.

the knowledge of the truth, there remains no sacrifice (which can be offered) for sins, but only a dreadful expectation of judgment, and fiery wrath destined to consume the enemies (of God) (x. 26-27).

With this passage we should compare the section vi. 4-6 discussed above.¹ The sin referred to is quite definitely rejection of the truth, contempt for the revelation of God in Christ. The writer speaks of the death-penalty attaching to defiance of the law of Moses, and he then adds:

How much greater a punishment will the man be judged to have incurred, who has trampled on the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace! . . . It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God (x. 29-30).

The nature of the sin warned against is stated in its fearful reality, and the language—'trampling on the Son of God', etc.—has a terrible gravity. Of whom is the writer thinking? In an earlier comment on the language of the parallel section vi. 4-6 it was observed that the words 'they crucify the Son of God for themselves' were patient of the interpretation that the persons in question were Christians who were putting themselves in the position of the Jews. Here the language has a more general character and does not absolutely decide whether this flagrant rejection of the Christian revelation, this trampling on the Son of God, is by a Jewish-Christian group resiling backwards from, or by another group 'going forward' beyond Christ, as Gnostically-minded brethren tended to do.²

¹ Above, pp. 63 f.

² Cf. again 1 John ii. 18 f.

A REMINISCENCE AND AN ASSURANCE.—THE
ADVENT OF CHRIST (x. 32-39)

Recall, however, the former days, after your enlightenment, when you stood up to a hard ordeal of suffering, being now publicly exposed in your own persons to insults and hardships, and now associated with others who were so treated. For you had sympathy with the imprisoned, and cheerfully accepted the seizure of your goods, knowing that yourselves had a better, an enduring inheritance. Do not now fling away that courage, which has in it the promise of a great reward. Patience is necessary that you may do the will of God and get fulfilment of the promise. For in ever so short a time now the Coming One will arrive, He will linger no more. And 'My righteous one shall live by his faith: if he resiles, My soul has no pleasure in him'. But we are not for resiling and being lost, but for believing and winning the soul (x. 32-39).

A deeply interesting historical reference to the early fortunes of the group addressed. If we suppose—and there is no reason to reject the assumption—that the ordeal referred to in the passage points back to the disturbances created at Rome by the edict of the Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49,¹ the persons addressed will have belonged to the original nucleus, the charter-members, so to speak, of the Church at Rome, and will, therefore, in all probability have been of Jewish extraction. This presumption cannot, of course, be proved, nor can any decisive conclusion be drawn from the action of 'resiling' or drawing back which the writer imputes to the group in its present trend. We cannot venture to say, on the strength of the language alone,

¹ See above, pp. 40 f.

that the lapse in question was in the Jewish direction and not, say, to sheer irreligion.

On the other hand, there is one part of the section from which more positive inferences may reasonably be drawn. This is the assurance given in verse 37:

'In ever so short a time now the Coming One will arrive, He will linger no more.'

More clearly than anywhere else in the Epistle, it would appear that disappointment over the delay of the Parousia of Christ was one cause at least of the community's apathy and loss of faith. Such disappointment might, of course, be general, affecting all types of Christians in the Church. In view, however, of the character of the primitive Christian outlook before the time of Stephen, it is at least legitimate to ask whether it would not be felt by Jewish Christians within the Church more sharply and characteristically than by others. While Stephen and the greater part of the world-mission Church, at Rome as elsewhere, believed that the Church must anticipate the return of Christ by going out into the world and preaching the gospel to all the nations,¹ the early 'Hebrew' community at Jerusalem looked for Christ to come to them, restoring the Kingdom to 'Israel'. If the group at Rome leaned in this latter direction, the re-assurance given them by the writer would have special point and relevance.

All we can say for certain, however, is that the group was losing its hold on the glory and hope of its eschato-

¹ Cf. the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels on the point. In the Parousia discourse in Mark xiii. 10 we read: 'to all the nations must the gospel first be preached.' In Matthew xxiv. 14 this takes the expanded form: 'this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world, for a witness to the nations; and then will the End come.'

logical calling, which demanded a perseverance in faith allowing of no relaxation of the original tension set up in the soul. Nevertheless, the writer ends on the note of hope. He expresses his confidence that his readers will reconsider the position. Including them with himself and the larger Church, he says: 'We are not for resiling and being lost, but for believing and winning the soul.'

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF FAITH (xi. 1-40)

The great chapter on Faith follows appropriately on the words about not resiling and being lost but believing and winning the soul. The supra-historical character of the religious life is stressed, illustrations of its transcendent quality being drawn from the heroic figures of the Old Testament history from Abel to the Maccabean martyrs. The chapter is in this respect a re-affirmation and expansion of Stephen's great review of the same history in Acts vii.,¹ but there are some significant differences of emphasis. The writer is addressing his oration, not like Stephen to the Jews, but to a group of Christian people. There is, therefore, nothing in his statement of that indictment of the Jews for their apostasy and rejection of the prophets and messengers of God which is so marked a feature of Stephen's pronouncement; the rebellion, for example, of the Exodus generation against Moses² is not even mentioned. On the other hand, there is an even stronger accenting of that trumpet-call to 'Go out', which Stephen's ear detected everywhere in the Old Testament record, and

¹ See above, Chapter II, pp. 30-36.

² Acts vii. 35-40.

which for him was the keynote of God's whole calling of His people Israel.

For the purposes of our present study we are concerned mainly with the practical and admonitory bearings of the writer's exposition. It falls into three easily recognisable sections. In the first (xi. 1-6) a definition of faith is given in terms of its primary character as subjective apprehension of the reality of the invisible world. The second section (xi. 7-16) passes on to the essentially eschatological bearing of this reality upon present life and action. In the third section (xi. 17-40) the writer dwells on the trials, endurances, heroisms, sacrifices, privations and martyrdoms, as well as triumphs, which have been the concomitants and consequences of faith throughout the history of revealed religion. In the illustrative record the figures which stand out most prominently are Abraham, Moses, and the heroes and martyrs of the later period.

1. The writer begins with a definition of faith.

Faith is a firm assurance with regard to the objects of our hope. It is a conviction of the reality of the invisible world. It was for this quality that the men of old had witness borne to them. By faith we conceive the worlds to have been fashioned by the word of God, the visible order taking its origin out of invisible things (xi. 1-3).

The word *hypostasis* which is here rendered 'firm assurance' means literally a 'standing or existing under', and is used variously in Greek writers to express the ideas of support, basis, substructure or substratum, underlying reality, strength or firmness, character, purpose, substance and the like. As applied to the temporal process, it can signify duration, the basic principle underlying time, and so it occurs in one or

two notable passages in the Septuagint version of the Psalms.¹ As applied to things, it connotes origin, foundation, structure, substance. As applied to mental and moral qualities and states, it indicates steadiness, firmness, assurance, persuadedness and the like.

The two principal senses between which we have to choose in the present passage are (i) substance, reality, essence, and (ii) confidence, firmness of persuasion, certitude. In the first of these two senses *hypostasis* is employed in Hebrews i. 3 to express that essence or being of God of which Christ is the reflex or stamp. But this sense is not admissible in the present context, for it cannot by any stretch of imagination be supposed that the writer understands faith to confer reality on things which have no substance or existence in themselves.² What faith does is to recognise what are here called 'invisible' things as the supreme realities and to make them determinative of the life of religion. We must adopt, therefore, the second of the above senses of the word, and understand *hypostasis* here to signify a mental condition of assurance regarding, or confidence in, the objects of religious hope. This is the meaning in chapter iii. 14 where the participation of Christians with Christ is made conditional upon the keeping of their initial assurance firm to the end.³ So in the present passage faith is that subjective apprehension of transcendent realities by which these realities become basic and all-determinative for the religious life. Similarly the term *elenchos*, rendered

¹ Cf. Psalm xxxviii. 6 (LXX): 'My duration of age is as nothing before Thee'; Psalm lxxxviii. 48 (LXX): 'Remember how brief is my duration of life.'

² As Greek patristic exegetes like John Chrysostom thought. See Moffatt's note.

³ Cf. the similar use of the word in 2 Corinthians ix. 4, xi. 17.

'conviction' in the above translation, primarily denotes test or proof, but here through the exigencies of the writer's argument it is given an extension of range by which it includes the inward principle of persuadedness or certitude which answers to the objective evidence offered. The life of faith is by both terms grounded on cognitive assent to the reality of heavenly things, but this assent by the very nature of its objects carries with it the acceptance of a transcendent value and use for life. From being a cognitive act faith passes into a principle regulating and inspiring behaviour. Its motives are existential.

What this signifies for the group of Christians addressed by the writer of Hebrews will be presently made apparent. Meantime he points out that such faith has been the distinguishing mark of all true religion since the world began (xi. 2); it underlies the Biblical doctrine of divine creation, according to which the understanding and the use of all life depend on the absoluteness of God's Word (xi. 3); faith also won for Abel the enduring title of 'the righteous' because it conformed his religion to the character of God; and for Enoch it procured the testimony that he 'pleased' God. What is revealed in such types of faith is not only belief in God's existence, but ardent commitment of life to God's justice, grace, and award (xi. 4-6).

2. The writer now shows from the record of the past how faith as apprehension and appropriation of the reality of the invisible world involves a choice between that world and the present order of things. He instances, in particular, Noah and Abraham.

By faith Noah, when warned by God of events not yet in sight, reverently prepared an ark for the salvation

of his household: and by this act he condemned the world, and became an inheritor of the righteousness that accords with faith (xi. 7).

The nature of the decision required by faith, the 'Either-or' with which it confronts us, comes clearly here to the light. Noah's act involved the recognition that the present world was, in God's sight, in the wrong, but he did not on that account hesitate to make his choice. And so he entered into possession of that state of 'rightness with God' which answers to, or follows upon faith. Without such decision of faith this inheritance would not, in the sinful state of the world, have been reached. An even clearer case was Abraham's.

By faith Abraham, when called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out without any knowledge of where he was going. By faith he became a temporary settler in a land which, though promised to him, was to him like a foreign country. He housed in tents with Isaac and Jacob, his co-inheritors in the same promise, for he looked for the City which was solidly founded, whose builder and maker was God (xi. 8-10).

Hebrews and Stephen (Acts vii. 2-7) alike start from Genesis xii. for their exposition of Abraham's faith, not like St. Paul from Genesis xv. 6. Abraham's faith was shown by his act of abandoning home and country for an invisible inheritance in the future, and by his acceptance of the lot of a landless *ger* in the present world. He was a displaced person, who wandered with his descendants in an alien environment until he died, and his frail tent-home never ceased to contrast with the city of God's foundation on which at the

divine call he had staked his all. Sarah's faith also is commemorated as an illustration (xi. 11-12).

All these died believing. The promises did not come home to them here. They only saw and hailed them at a distance, and acknowledged that they were foreigners and sojourners on earth. Yes, people who speak like this make it plain that they are in quest of a country of their own. If their thought went back to the land out of which they came, they would have opportunity to revert to it. As it is, they long for a better, that is to say, a heavenly country, and therefore God is not ashamed to be named by them their God. He has indeed prepared a city for them (xi. 13-16).

The relevance of these moving words to the situation of a backward-looking, disappointed, ostracised group of Christians in the world's capital city needs no exposition.

3. The writer passes lastly to the triumphs wrought by faith in Biblical history, and to the tests, endurance, sacrifices, and heroisms which have been inseparable from its transcendent decisions. Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac is instanced; it was an act which illustrated and anticipated the Christian faith in the Resurrection (xi. 17-19). The tenacity of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph in holding to the divine promise of 'the things to come' is next mentioned (xi. 20-22). But the supreme example is the faith of Moses, whose choice and sacrifice made possible, under God, the Exodus of the people of God from Egypt and the Covenant made with that people at Sinai (xi. 23-29).

By faith Moses, when grown to manhood, declined to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, preferring to share ill-usage with the people of God than to spend a

transient life in the indulgence of sin. He deemed the reproach of Christ a richer wealth than Egypt's treasures, for his eye was to the divine reward. By faith he left Egypt, not from fear of the king's anger: he was as one who saw the (King) invisible, and so held out. By faith he observed the Passover and the rite of the Blood-aspersion, that the Destroyer might not touch their first-born (xi. 24-28).

The points here emphasised in illustration of the character and consequences of Moses' act of faith—his vision of the Invisible One, his refusal to continue under the shelter and privilege of the Egyptian court, his choice of suffering with the people of God, his definite decision thereby to accept 'the reproach of Christ' in preference to the richest treasure on earth, his steady eye to the ultimate reward—would scarcely be missed by the Christians to whom the author of Hebrews was writing. They too have been called to a life of renunciation with the people of God. They too—on the hypothesis of their Jewish extraction—have had to give up an earlier position of imperial privilege under the *religio licita* of Judaism. They too must face the reproach incurred by their belief in Jesus as the Messiah, and must endure obloquy and material impoverishment for the sake of an eschatological award. They will see now that Moses himself, the institutor of the Passover rite and the cultus, was a confessor of Christ by the nature of his supreme choice and a participator in His sorrows, and is thus to be reckoned as one with the Christian people of God. When the writer says that Moses chose 'the reproach of Christ', the words admit of being understood in a purely analogical sense: Moses by throwing in his lot with the oppressed Hebrews was indeed accepting the same kind of con-

tumely to which Jesus afterwards was subjected. But it is more in accordance with the writer's general understanding of the Old Testament history to consider that what he means here is that the Christ, the pre-incarnate Son of God, was actually a participant in the events of the Exodus, and Moses, when he made his great decision, *ipso facto* accepted and identified himself with the Christ's sufferings. In this way, though the point is not explicitly made, the Passover and the Blood-sprinkling which Moses instituted in Judaism are to be integrated with, and finally fulfilled in the redemption wrought by Jesus.

The accentuation in the passage of the 'reproach of Christ' hints that the supreme difficulty which the circle of Christians appealed to in the Epistle had to face was the misrepresentation and disparagement to which their confession of Jesus as the Christ exposed them, and which perhaps they contrasted painfully with the privilege and security enjoyed by Judaism under the Roman imperial administration. Over against this the writer exalts the splendid and indeed stupendous achievements of the hero-judges, princes, and prophets of Israel from the age of the Exodus onwards, and the renunciations which were made for the sake of righteousness down to, and including the Maccabean martyrs for the Law (xi. 29-38). The writer does not touch on the redemptive value of these martyrdoms as the Maccabean literature does,¹ but he dwells on the faith which, casting away the hope of deliverance here, laid hold on the assurance of 'a better resurrection' hereafter.

These all established a name for faith, but the Promise

¹ Cf. IV Maccabees vi. 28 f., xvii. 21 f.

did not come home to them (here). God had something better in view for us, (and so purposed) that they should not attain the Perfection apart from us (xi. 39-40).

As Dr. Moffatt interprets it, 'God in His good providence reserved the Messianic *teleiosis* of Jesus Christ, until we could share it'.¹ In other words, the Christian people of God are to be integrated with the heroes and martyrs of the past in the felicity of the last, heavenly consolation. What this requires of the Christians addressed in the Epistle is stated in chapter xii.

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

(xii. 1-3)

Therefore, as we have so vast a throng of witnesses surrounding us, let us discard every encumbrance and besetting sin, and run with steady purpose the course appointed for us, directing our eyes towards Jesus, the Pioneer and the Consummator of faith. He for the sake of the joy appointed for Him bravely accepted the Cross, disregarding its shame, and He has taken His seat at the right hand of God. Just reflect what it meant for Him to face so courageously all that opposition of sinful men to Himself—that you may not grow faint and weary in your souls (xii. 1-3).

This summons follows appropriately on the great exposition of Faith, and the citation of heroic examples from the past history of religion in chapter xi. The passage gives supreme and classical expression to the writer's outlook on the Christian life, emphasising the upward objective direction of its vision, and the eschatological nature of its goal. In his comments on Hebrews xi. Dr. E. F. Scott remarks that, in one respect, the

¹ *Commentary*, p. 191.

idea of faith here expounded is 'not fully Christian', for it finds its inspiration and typology in lives untouched by definite Christian influences.¹ It may be replied that this is to overlook the two considerations, (1) that for the author the eschatological calling of God has had one and the same character in all the ages, both when, as in the Old Testament past, salvation was described only as a promise, and when, as now, it has entered through Jesus on its fulfilment-phase; (2) that for the author Christ was already present in the Old Testament history,² so that the response of the heroes of faith to the calling of God was in a real sense a response to Him. That at any rate would seem to be the implication of the present passage.

The 'cloud' of witnesses now seen to be surrounding the Christian community on earth may suggest to us the mental picture of the packed throng of spectators in an amphitheatre which shimmers or swims before the eyes of the agonists in the arena. But in reality it is not towards us that these witnesses have their faces turned but towards Jesus, whom they already truly beheld when they endured 'as seeing Him who is invisible'; and it is not because their eyes are upon us that we are to throw off every encumbrance and the sin which so easily gets round us, but because we are engaged in the same conflict or contest as the 'witnesses' were, and must look for inspiration in the same direction. Athletes in the lists of faith, Christians are to divest themselves of all that hampers or betrays them into sin. In the case of those Christians whom the writer has in mind the allusion may well be to the retarding or seductive influence of memories or sentiments which

¹ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 190 f.

² See above, pp. 79 f., and below, pp. 96, 144, 184-187.

date from their Jewish past, before the time when the fulfilment-phase of God's calling announced itself in Jesus. In any case it is not to the past or to the environing world or even into their own souls that Christians are to look, but towards Jesus who, as He has started His people on the eternal course of life, will see them to the finish. The writer cites the supreme example given us in Jesus' own acceptance of the Cross despite the 'shame' which it involved. It is in His spirit that we must face the obloquy and suffering which our confession of faith in Him involves. Here two brief comments fall to be made.

First, the words above translated 'for the sake of the joy appointed for Him' admit also of being rendered 'in exchange for (or in place of) the joy appointed for Him', and they are so understood by some expositors. The reference will then be to the pre-incarnate bliss which the Son of God renounced in order to accept and fulfil His redeeming office. But though that conception finds expression in St. Paul, especially in the great passage Philippians ii. 5 ff., the writer to the Hebrews never speaks of the Redeemer's sacrifice in terms of a pre-incarnate renunciation, and therefore the ordinary understanding of the words ought to be preferred.

Secondly, the writer relates the sacrifice of Christ to His courageous facing of 'so great an opposition of sinners to Himself'. This is the great 'analogy' of faith on which the Christians addressed are to meditate in case they should grow faint and weary in their souls. The Cross of Jesus takes its character from His supreme act of faith in accepting and enduring all that 'fearful enmity of the carnal heart of man towards God' which raged around Him on Calvary; and redemption, the consummation of the course of the faithful life, demands

of Christians the same kind of courage when confronted by similar contradiction. But there is a variant reading which for 'the opposition of sinners to Himself' has 'the opposition of sinners to themselves', which would suggest, as the most appalling feature of the apocalypse of evil which broke out against Jesus, the riot of self-contradiction going on in men's own hearts. We might then think of the mutually refutative charges brought against Him by false witnesses at His trial before the Sanhedrin or while He hung on the Cross. But while the English Revised Version and numerous scholars prefer this as the more difficult of the two readings, it is not at all certain that either of the two readings, 'against Himself' or 'against themselves', stood in the original text. They may have originated as alternative glosses noted in the margin of an archetype which did not specify against whom the 'contradiction' was directed. So Dr. Moffatt in his *Commentary* on the passage.¹

OTHER EXHORTATIONS

(xii. 5-17, xiii. 1-8, 15-25)

The writer follows up his main appeal by the addition of various concluding admonitions, the first of them an exhortation to submit to that 'discipline' which Christians must expect as 'sons' of God (xii. 5-11). He then reverts to the self-discipline which regard for the final object of the Christian journey demands as

¹ 'Against himself' is the reading of A P, some codices of the Latin Vulgate, the Harkleian Syriac, and the mass of Greek MSS. 'Against themselves' is read by \aleph D and the Latin and Syriac Vulgates.

against slack hands, weak knees, and lameness (xii. 12-13). The injunction to seek 'peace with all men', as necessary to that 'consecration' without which no one shall attain to the eschatological vision of God, may be an indirect rebuke to the separatist tendencies of a reactionary minority; 'missing the grace of God' and allowing a 'root of bitterness' to spring up with troublesome and demoralising consequences for the community may refer—as the echo of the language of Deuteronomy xxix. 18 shows—to the religious infidelity into which the minority's lapse from true Christianity is leading them; and the same interpretation may be put on the warning against tolerating in the Church any 'fornicator or profane person like Esau'. It is not certain that the first of these two terms necessarily refers to sexual immorality, as Dr. Moffatt thinks, for the whole context is dominated by the idea of *religious* infidelity, spiritual lapse from the truth of God: certainly it was unbelief in the divine promise to his house, not mere sensuality, that led Esau to the irrevocable step of bartering away his birthright. No later repentance was able to undo that act (xii. 14-17). It is plain that for the writer to the Hebrews religion (cf. vi. 4-6) was not a matter only of repenting and obtaining forgiveness, but of irrevocable commitment of life to a supernatural end.

We need not follow the writer's injunctions to the close. It would be natural enough for him to include in his letter some matters not necessarily connected with the central point at issue. Yet the various counsels about hospitality (xiii. 1-3), maintaining the marriage bond intact (xiii. 4), avoiding avarice (xiii. 5-6), remembering and submitting to Church leaders (xiii. 7, 17), and keeping up beneficence and charity (xiii. 16) may

well have been intended as warnings against the unfortunate consequences of separation and schism within the Church.

CONCLUSIONS FROM CHAPTER III

We are now in a position to summarise briefly the conclusions to which the above study of the admonitory sections of the Epistle has led.

I. The Epistle in its concentration of interest on the supernal and heavenly end of the Christian calling and in the particular terms of its emphasis on the exaltation of Jesus above the Mosaic Law and the Cultus stands in the direct line of succession to the teaching of Stephen and the world-mission.

II. The addressees were a minority group in the Church which was lapsing from the strength and purity of its eschatological hope, but whether it was a specifically Jewish-Christian minority affected by influences from the side of Judaism, or some other group tempted in a different direction, is not absolutely and finally determinable from the evidence of these admonitory sections taken alone.

III. All of the admonitory passages, however, are *compatible* with the hypothesis of the Jewish-Christian character of the group, and several of them distinctly favour that hypothesis rather than any other. It is only necessary to recall in this connection what has been said above on ii. 1-5, iii. 1-5, iv. 1-2, vi. 1-2, vi. 4-6, x. 25, x. 32-39, and xi. 24-28.¹ None of these passages lends any colour to the idea that the proclivities of the group lay in the Hellenistic pagan direction. All of them, on the contrary, acquire heightened point and

¹ See pp. 48 f., 53, 58 f., 62 f., 64, 68 f., 71 f., 79 f. above for the evidence of these passages.

relevance if we assume the background of the group to have been Jewish.

Thus, to recapitulate the evidence briefly, the insistence of the writer on the authority of Christ as above that of the 'angels' suggests some leaning of the readers to the Law given on Sinai (ii. 1-5), and the same holds, in only a slightly lesser degree, of his emphasis on the glory of Christ as greater than that of the 'faithful' Moses (iii. 1-3). Also the warning given to certain persons that they are 'crucifying' the Son of God for themselves (vi. 4-6) gains additional point if we take the writer to mean that by their lapse from Christian faith these persons are virtually identifying themselves with the position of the Jews towards Christ.

Again, if the allusion to the early ordeal of suffering which the community underwent after its first enlightenment (x. 32 f.) refers to the Claudian measures taken against the Jews of Rome in A.D. 49, it carries with it the inference that the Christians in question were among the first persons converted to the faith of Christ at Rome, and were, therefore, presumably Jews.

So, again, the strong accentuation of Moses' choice and of his preference of 'the reproach of Christ' to his privilege of place at the Egyptian court (xi. 24-28) is excellently explained, as we have seen, if the Christians addressed were conscious of having forfeited through their adherence to Christ the advantages once possessed by them as Jews under the Roman imperial administration.

IV. The fact that nowhere in these sections is there any hint of Gnostic and Hellenistic aberrations of religious belief on the side of the group is capital evidence in the same direction.